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# **The Bengal Revolutionaries and Freedom Movement**



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# LAND MARKS IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

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## The Bengal Revolutionaries and Freedom Movement.

By  
DR. DALIA RAY  
LL.B.

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## Foreword

The militant nationalist movement which started even before the Swadeshi movement in Bengal marked an important phase in the growth of political consciousness in our country. It was the militant nationalists and not the official Congress which first voiced the demand for complete political freedom of India. Leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh and Bepin Chandra Pal conceived the idea of a four-fold boycott which anticipated by at least a decade the ideas of non-cooperation and passive resistance, preached by Mahatma Gandhi after the First World War. Unlike Gandhi the militant nationalists, however, never made a fetish of non-violence, and some of them like Jatin Mukherjee, Rasbehary Bose and Narendranath Bhattacharya (later known as M.N. Roy), tried to achieve liberation from British rule with the help of money, arms and ammunitions received secretly from foreign powers inimical to the British. This again foreshadowed the exploits of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose probably the greatest of the Indian revolutionaries, during the Second World War. The militant nationalist movement did not, of course, meet with immediate success, but the same may be said of the three great mass movements waged by the Congress under Gandhi's leadership during the years 1920-'42. Like the Congress movements mentioned above, the militant nationalist movement also helped arouse the political consciousness of our people by placing before them concrete cause of India's freedom. Long-term imprisonment, physical torture and even the gallows lost their terror for at least a section of our youngmen.

In the present study of the militant nationalist movement in Bengal during the first two decades of the present century the author has sought to make a detailed and analytical study of the political, economic, social, religious and educational ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries. She has been able to demonstrate that these ideas, though not always very clearly articulated or consistently propagated, were in advance of the political and social ideas of the Indian National Congress during this time. She has also investigated the charge which is brought against the revolutionaries that they were communal or anti-Muslim in character, and that in the long run this retarded the progress of the national movement in India. The author has made a comparative

study of different militant nationalist movements in India and Europe, and tried to note the similarity of ideas between some of these and the movement in Bengal which she speaks of. The limitations of the movement have not been glossed over in spite of the author's genuine sympathy and regard for the Bengal revolutionaries. One may or may not agree with all the conclusions reached by the author, but the book certainly deserves a careful reading by all students of modern Indian history.

**Amitabha Mukherjee**  
**Professor of History,**  
**Jadavpur University**

March 22, 1990



## Dedication

"Dedicated to my parents whose love, inspiration and support has enabled me to write this book."

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## PREFACE

The revolutionary movement in Bengal (1902-1919) constituted one of the most significant phases in the history of the Indian Freedom Movement. The constitutional agitation which preceded the Revolutionary Movement and was led by moderate leaders like Gokhale, Pheroze Shah Mehta, Surendra Nath Banerjee and others, was an agitation for gaining merely some constitutional and administrative reforms, at best, the right to colonial self-government within the British Empire, by following a policy of prayer and petition. The moderates thus worked not to uproot the British rule from India but merely to supplement and improve it. The revolutionary or the militant Nationalist movement, on the other hand, aimed at achieving *Purna Swaraj* or absolute independence of India from foreign rule by means of active and passive resistance. It was an open and vehement protest against the moderate type of politics. The new cult of bomb and revolution, preached by the revolutionaries, gave an entirely new dimension to India's struggle for freedom, and opened a new vista of hope to the freedom-lovers of the country. The non-violent, non-co-operation movement which started after the end of the First World War under the leadership of Gandhiji and which followed the revolutionary movement was a mass movement which, for the first time, generated a countrywide mass consciousness and evoked mass interest and mass will to achieve freedom of the motherland. The revolutionary movement in Bengal, though not a mass movement in the real sense of that term, set before the freedom-loving people of this country a bright example of personal courage and heroic self-sacrifice, and thus inspired them to lay down their lives, if necessary, in the country's cause.

The period from 1902 to 1919 has been chosen as the period of this dissertation for several reasons. The year 1902 was a very significant year in the history of India, as it marked the demise of Swami Vivekananda, the patron-saint of the movement, and the establishment of the first important revolutionary organization in Calcutta, the Anushilan Samiti. Vivekananda gave a clarion call to his countrymen to shake off their inertia and serve the motherland. Primarily a monk, he fired the imagination of the youths of Bengal by preaching the vedanta philosophy through his innumerable writings and speeches, and gave them an added sense of dignity and pride in their own culture as well as a spiritual inspiration in their struggle for liberation. On 24th March, 1902, the Anushilan Samiti, the first important secret society which undertook to organize and train the revolutionaries was also set up in Calcutta by Satish Chandra Bose with the well-known barrister Pramathanath Mitra as its president. I have brought down my account to 1919, because it marked the culmination of the first phase of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. The year 1919 marked the advent of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in the Indian political arena, and, for a few years, the revolutionary movement was eclipsed by Gandhi's non-violent, non-co-operation movement.

My book consists of seven chapters, in the first chapter, I have discussed briefly the history of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal and the factors which contributed to the growth of this movement. The total failure of the moderate policy of prayer and petition created a strong opposition both within and outside the Congress. Discontent among the people of Bengal was further aggravated by the official implementation of the scheme of partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon's Government in the face of outright opposition of the Bengali nationalists. All these discredited the moderates in the eyes of the nation, and gave birth to an extremist politics which soon took a concrete shape in the form of the revolutionary movement. The ruthless economic exploitation of India by the British Government and the abject poverty of the Indian people led to a seething discontent among the middle and lower middle classes in Bengal which facilitated the growth of the revolutionary movement. The religio-political ideas of Swami Vivekananda and the inspiration of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's celebrated novel, *Anandamath*, made a strong impact on the revolutionaries, and helped them formulate political and social ideas of their own. Further, the outstanding victory of Japan over Russia in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-'05 destroyed the myth of invincibility of the Western powers,



greatly inspired the nationalists in their struggle for liberation, and boosted up their morale. The Dawn Society under the leadership of Satish Chandra Mukherjee became an important training centre for the youths of Bengal, made them conscious of their rich cultural heritage, and awakened in their young minds a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism, and the will to achieve freedom, which also largely helped the growth of the revolutionary movement in this province. The partition of Bengal led to the growth of the spirit of *Swadeshi* which emphasized the use of home-made goods and the boycott of British goods, and which helped the revolutionaries form their own social and economic ideas. The revolutionary secret societies, some of which had originated even before the Partition (such as the Anushilan Samiti in Calcutta), received a great impetus from the anti-partition and Swadeshi movement. The patriotic sentiments nurtured by nationalist-minded writers and poets of Bengal as well as the growth of a revolutionary press helped propagate the ideas of the revolutionaries far and wide. Finally, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought about a possibility of the revolutionaries receiving financial and military aid from the enemies of the British, particularly the German Government. At the end of this chapter, I have shown that in spite of so many favourable factors, the revolutionary movement failed to achieve its object owing mainly to certain inherent weaknesses.

The second chapter of my book deals with the political ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries. They preached the ideal of *Purna Swaraj* or absolute independence from British rule, and hoped to achieve it through courage, self-sacrifice, active and passive resistance, and terrorism, or the cult of the bomb. Some of their leaders realized the importance of mass movement, but failed to establish mass contact. Others saw the necessity of seeking foreign sympathy and support for the national cause. In this connection I have also discussed the methods employed by the revolutionaries such as secret assassination of British officials and their Indian subordinates, traitors and informers, committing of political dacoity for the purpose of collecting money and purchasing arms needed for revolutionary work, and also, where it suited, passive resistance and boycott of British goods, government-controlled schools and colleges as well as government offices. But there was a divergence of opinion among the revolutionaries regarding the method of action to be followed. Though Aurobindo Ghosh was the harbinger of the new cult of terrorism and violence in Bengal, (of which Barindra Kumar Ghosh and later on Bhupendranath Datta became

staunch supporters and upholders), many revolutionaries like Bepin Chandra Pal, Barrister Pramathanath Mitra and Jadugopal Mukherjee were opposed to this cult. While Bepin Pal sought to gain *Swaraj* through total boycott of the British Government, Pramathanath Mitra wanted to build up slowly and steadily India's army of liberation by organising and giving proper military training to the youngmen of this country, and Jadugopal Mukherjee believed in the efficacy of a mass movement which could be brought about by enlisting the support of the youth, the labour, the peasants and the soldiers. Rashbehari Bose and Jatindranath Mukherjee tried to secure military and financial support from foreign powers, inimical to the British. Again while most revolutionaries believed in an armed struggle, some among them were not in favour of terrorism or undertaking extreme methods of violence. While discussing the political ideas of the revolutionaries, I have also pointed out that many of them did not at first have any definite political ideology except the idea of liberation of the motherland by the use of force. This was partly due to the fact that they had joined the movement at a very tender age. They rather obeyed their elders and carried out the latter's instructions. This particular information is derived from the oral interviews which I have taken of a few revolutionaries who are still alive and now residing in Calcutta. I have alluded briefly to the controversy regarding the extent of Sister Nivedita's active participation in the revolutionary movement in Bengal. While discussing the idea of passive resistance, as preached by the revolutionaries, I have tried to point out the difference between their way of thinking and that of Mahatma Gandhi. While the revolutionaries anticipated Gandhi's ideas of non-cooperation, passive resistance and boycott of the British authority, they did not share Gandhi's faith in *ahimsa* or non-violence. They preached passive resistance only as an instrument of struggle, while Gandhi elevated passive resistance and non-violence to a moral principle, an article of faith. I have also given a brief account of the revolutionary literature of this period--newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and books written and published by the revolutionaries through which they propagated their political ideas. I have concluded this chapter by mentioning, in brief, the differences of opinion which arose among the bengal revolutionaries with the advent of Gandhiji on the Indian political scene on the question of joining Gandhi's non-violent, non-co-operation movement. Though the political ideology of the revolutionaries of this period was far in advance of the age--to a large extent, influenced by similar movements in France, Italy, Ireland,



Russia and America;—there was much originality, truth and significance in their ideas, and they outlined the basic norms on which the later Indian nationalists, formulated their ideas.

The third chapter of the present work contains the religious ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries. Any discussion of their political ideas will remain incomplete without a reference to their religious ideas as well, since these were interlinked and inextricably bound to one another. The revolutionaries formulated their political doctrines on the basis of some important tenets of Hinduism, often cited examples from the holy scriptures in support of their political views, and sought to preach their political ideas in a religious garb in order to make those ideas appear more realistic and more readily acceptable to their countrymen. Inspired by the fiery speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda on the philosophical teachings of the Vedanta and the Gita, and a semi-religious devotion to the motherland, the revolutionaries, for the first time, sought to elevate nationalism and patriotism to the rank of religion and to transform religion into patriotism and nationalism. They conceived the notion of the divinity of their motherland by regarding the country not only as their own mother but also as the Goddess incarnate, whose service was considered a religious duty on the part of her children and also the only way to salvation. I have pointed out in this connection that the Bengal revolutionaries were in general, men of deep religious conviction and cherished a deep faith in God. They visualized God in the nation and preached the idea of total dedication and self-surrender to this God. They gave a new interpretation to the *Gita*, calling it a scripture of the *Karmayoga*, and vigorously preached the ideal of *nishkama karma* i.e., doing one's duty without any expectation of reward. They upheld the ideas of the immortality of the soul and of '*nimitta matra*' which implied that men were mere instruments in the hands of God. They even sought to justify armed struggle and indulgence in violence and terrorism for attaining the country's freedom on the grounds of necessity and expediency, by citing similar examples from the *Gita*, and thereby justified their radical political views with the help of religion. I have mentioned in this chapter the religious activities of the Anushilan Samiti in Calcutta and the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, where regular classes were held for expounding the doctrines of the *Gita*, the Vedanta, the Upanishads and other Hindu religious texts to their members. Besides, the members of the Anushilan Samiti had to take an oath before the image of Goddess *Kali* at the time of their initiation to the revolutionary fold. The *Markandeya*

*Chandi* was also extensively read by the Revolutionaries, and in fact, Goddess *Kali* became their most favourite deity, and they took their most solemn vows before Her image. A revolutionary newspaper, the *Sandhya*, even went so far as to call the bomb made by the Revolutionaries as the '*Kali mai's boma*' or the bomb of Mother *Kali*. In short, what the revolutionaries attempted at was to bring about a revolution on religious basis. All their revolutionary documents were headed with Hindu religious invocations and symbols such as '*Om*'. I have referred to Aurobindo's book, the *Bhawani Mandir* (a scheme for erecting a temple for Goddess Bhawani or Kali, the Goddess of Shakti or power) and Bepin Pal's book entitled *The Soul of India* in which he depicted Sri Krishna as the soul of India and a perfect personality whose example should be followed by the Revolutionaries to attain their goal. The revolutionaries also preached the struggle for Swaraj as a God-ordained duty, equated the idea of freedom with God Himself, and regarded the nationalist movement as essentially a spiritual movement. I have also thought it relevant to mention in this chapter the controversy regarding the extent of participation of the missionaries of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in the revolutionary movement. My conclusion is that the missionaries did not take any active part in the revolutionary movement, though they had a great sympathy for the national struggle, gave shelter to some absconding revolutionaries who wanted to embrace the life of a *Sannyasin*, and in a few cases even helped the families of the political sufferers. Many revolutionaries who after being branded as political suspects, took refuge in the Ramakrishna Mission, later on embraced the life of the *Sannyasin* (monk) and became eminent members of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. I have concluded this chapter with a short discussion on the nature of the religious ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries. Though their religious ideas were Hindu-oriented, they were neither anti-Muslim, nor pro-Hindu in the strict sense of these terms but were rather secular in their outlook. It is true that no Muslim was admitted to the Dacca Anushilan Samiti. But I think that the prevailing political circumstances in Bengal following the Anti-Partition agitation and the communal riots of 1907, and the fact that many Muslims were at this time siding with the British Government in the hope of gaining official favours compelled the Dacca Anushilan Samiti to impose this restriction. Extremist leaders like B.C. Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh, on the other hand, were very broad-minded and always stressed in their writings the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. So it will be absolutely unjust and unfair to hold



the religious idealism of the Bengal Revolutionaries responsible for the growth of communalism in India. The revolutionaries never had any grudge against the Muslim community; their movement was directed against the alien rule. But many Muslims regarded themselves as Muslims first and Indians next, particularly during the Anti-Partition agitation in Bengal. Besides, historically speaking, Muslim separatist feelings were aroused much earlier by the Aligarh Movement which started in the seventies of the 19th century. Finally, it may be remarked that though the religious ideas of the Bengal Revolutionaries indirectly encouraged conservative sentiments in the social sphere to some extent, examples of such conservatism were more of an exception than a general rule.

In chapter four, I have discussed the social and economic ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries. Though they did not have the time or patience to look deep into all the social evils then prevailing in the society, and devise necessary remedies for the uplift of the Indian people, they offered tough resistance to the inflow of foreign mechanical and materialistic civilization which they believed, sought to sap the vitality of the Indian culture and civilization. They preached the ideal of social service or serving the nation, although the motive behind it was not purely benevolent or humanistic, but also political to some extent. They wanted to come into direct contact with the masses and to win their sympathy and support for the national cause. Philanthropical activities would also serve as a suitable cloak to cover up their violent revolutionary activities. This idea of social service enjoined service to the poor and the sick, relief work during natural calamities like flood and famine, cremation of the dead, nursing of patients during plague or cholera epidemics and also village uplift work. The revolutionaries sought to build up a self-reliant society by preaching the idea of self-help and self-reliance. They were vociferous in their opposition to the social evils and abuses of the day such as the rigours of the caste system, caste arrogance of the Brahmins, child marriage, enforced widowhood etc., and also advocated the removal of social inequalities based upon caste and untouchability. They preached re-marriage of the Hindu widows, abolition of dowry in marriage and temperance (by picketing before liquor shops). The government reports also refer to the abolition of caste rigidity and removal of the disabilities of the lower castes as the main items of social reform, advocated by the revolutionaries. On the cultural side, the study of western philosophy and English poetry was encouraged by the *Samities*. I have mentioned, in this connection, the

important role played by the Dawn Society (1902-'06) under the leadership of Satish Chandra Mukherjee, in propagating India's moral and spiritual values whereby the Indians were made conscious of their rich cultural heritage. It is true that the revolutionaries did not put great emphasis on social reform. But this was because they believed that the primary need of the hour was to achieve the liberation of the country from the foreign yoke. Nevertheless, they never belittled the importance of social reform which, according to them, should come only after political independence and not before it.

With regard to the economic ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries, they preached the ideas of *Swadeshi* and boycott for the purpose of achieving *Purna Swaraj* or absolute independence. *Swadeshi* implied the use of country-made goods and development of indigenous industries in order to create new avenues of employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Boycott implied the starting of a sort of economic war against Great Britain by refusing to buy and use British-made goods, and by compelling others to do the same. In this connection, I have also discussed the contribution made by the Dawn Society to the promotion of the *Swadeshi* spirit in this country. A *Swadeshi* store was opened in Calcutta in 1903 and the National Council of Education started in 1906, made arrangements for importing vocational training to the youths of Bengal. I have also discussed the steps taken by the *Swadesh Bandhab Samiti* of Barisal, the *Anushilan Samiti* of Calcutta, the *Suhrid Samiti* of Mymensingh and similar other revolutionary societies of Bengal for the economic development of the country. Though revolutionaries like Aurobindo Ghosh contemplated the need of amelioration of the pro-letariat and wrote about it in the *Bande Mataram* (Weekly, 14th June, 1908) and in "New Lamps for Old", we do not hear of this idea any more after 1906-'07. The main reason for this was that the revolutionaries never made any serious or whole-hearted attempt to come into direct contact with the proletariat or the commoners, whether urban or rural. Truly, there was not much originality in the economic ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries. The ideas of *Swadeshi* and *boycott* had been formulated long ago by the Irish and American revolutionaries. Nevertheless credit must be given to the Bengal revolutionaries for evolving the idea of a five-pronged boycott (i.e., economic, social, political, judicial and educational), and placing before it a definite political object, namely liberation from British rule.



The fifth chapter deals with the educational ideas of the Bengal Revolutionaries which were really related to their political and socio-economic ideas. The revolutionaries conceived the idea of national education or education 'on national lines and under national control'. In this connection, I have discussed the attempts made by the Dawn Society to remedy the defects of the existing system of university education and to promote nationalist sentiments. *The Dawn Magazine* (1897) founded by Satish Chandra Mukherjee in collaboration with others also offered valuable service to the cause of national education. Both the Dawn Society and the magazine aimed at the moral and intellectual uplift of the youth of Bengal, and openly propagated ideas and schemes of national education which included moral education, vocational training and promotion of a nationalist spirit. The main purpose behind such education was the remaking of individuals through the study of Hindu life, thought and faith; and at the same time by making them conscious of the usefulness and necessity of other secular and religious systems, whether Eastern or Western. Later on, the National Council of Education was established (11th March, 1906) by Satish Chandra Mukherjee in collaboration with other eminent leaders of Bengal under the chairmanship of Rashbehari Ghosh, as a protest against the government's repressive measures against the nationalist students who had already begun to sever all connections with the officialized Calcutta University. The main object of the National Council of Education was to initiate literacy, scientific and technical education on national lines and under national control, with Bengali as the medium of instruction. The N.C.E. aimed at a total reconstruction of the entire educational system along national lines. But due to a difference of opinion among its supporters, two separate institutions were born. One was the Bengal Technical Institute (July 25, 1906), set up under the leadership of T.N. Palit and his colleagues, and the other was the Bengal National College and School (August 14, 1906), set up by Satish Chandra Mukherjee and others with Aurobindo Ghosh as its first Principal. In spite of their ideological differences, these two institutions together constituted a well planned attempt at revolutionising the entire educational system of Bengal. In this respect, the Bengal revolutionaries preached the idea of educational boycott or boycott of government schools and schools aided and controlled by the government. The object of national education, according to the revolutionaries, was not purely academic but also political to some extent, for it would train the youth in the proper way so as to enable

them to devote themselves to the service of the motherland. The revolutionaries believed that a system of national education must have its roots in the cultural heritage of the nation, and in the national sentiment and tradition. I have also stated briefly the ventures made by the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta for promoting mass literacy. Finally, I have pointed out that in spite of all such noteworthy attempts, the national education movement began to decline soon, as is evident from the government reports of this period. There was a gradual fall in the number of national schools, and many schools ceased to exist due to lack of adequate finances and adequate number of students. Besides the students of the national schools also realized after some time the difficulties of obtaining employment without a certificate of the Calcutta University. Mostly the students expelled from government schools and colleges for participating in the boycott movement joined the National College and the national schools, but their number was not large enough to maintain these institutions for a long time. However, many ideas of the national education movement (minus its political aspect) were later on accepted by the Calcutta University itself under the guidance of the great educationist, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee. The Bengal College of Engineering and Technology, sponsored by the N.C.E., later developed into Jadavpur University after independence.

In chapter six, I have dealt with the character of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. Here I have pointed out that the revolutionary movement was essentially a movement of the educated middle class intelligentsia which also received support from other sections of the society such as some landlords, professional people and even artisans and shop-keepers in urban areas. But the movement could not win the sympathy and support of the masses or common people, particularly peasants and industrial labourers. The very nature of the revolutionary activities (which had to be carried out in absolute secrecy) prevented the revolutionaries from coming into direct and close contact with the masses, though some of their leaders fully realized the importance of a mass awakening, and preached the necessity of establishing mass contact. The revolutionaries never made, in practice, any serious attempt to explain clearly their political programme to the common people as a result of which the latter did not understand their ideas and hence never showed any keen interest in the movement. Students of schools and colleges, belonging mainly to the middle class, however, took an active part in this movement. I have also tried to maintain that the revolutionary movement should not be branded as a purely terrorist



one. Terrorism was certainly one of the methods of work adopted by the Bengal Revolutionaries, but anarchism never formed any part of their programme. They adopted the terrorist tactics only to strike terror into the heart of the bureaucracy and to arouse the masses politically by their acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. The ideas of the revolutionaries had a strong Hindu orientation, as is evident from the revolutionary documents and the religious sanctions with which its organisers sought to endow it. The strong Hindu character of the movement, inevitable under the circumstances, is said to have widened the gulf between the Hindus and the Mohammedans. But Muslim participation in the earlier constitutional agitation of the Congress which was entirely secular in character was also very slight. The Muslims could not also be expected to fight against the partition of Bengal, which had resulted in the creation of a Muslim-majority province in Eastern Bengal and Assam, and which held out prospects of improvement to at least a section of the Muslim community. Moreover, there was no Muslim business community in Bengal at this time which could take advantage of the Swadeshi and boycott movements. The Swadeshi movement might have embittered Hindu-Muslim relations in some parts of Bengal. But Muslim separatism first developed at the time of the Aligarh movement long before the partition of Bengal. Besides, the revolutionaries never expressed any ill feelings against the Muslims as a community, but rather sought to befriend the latter. As regards women's participation in the movement, there was no such participation at the initial stage, though indirectly many women offered valuable services to the revolutionaries in their work. It was only towards the beginning of the First World War that some women began to take an active part in the movement. Finally, I have discussed some external influences on the growth of revolutionary ideas in Bengal. The revolutionary idealism of Bengal was greatly influenced by the ideas of the revolutionary leaders of Maharashtra like Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The revolutionary idealism of the leaders of the Italian Risorgimento, of the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland and of the Nihilist movement in Russia influenced the Bengal Revolutionaries to some extent. In conclusion, I have referred very briefly to the actual foreign contacts of the Bengal revolutionaries on the eve of the First World War and their endeavour to seek foreign support in money and arms.

The chapter seven is the concluding chapter of my book, where I have discussed the historical significance of the ideas and movement of the Bengal Revolutionaries and the important contributions made by

the latter to the cause of India's freedom. This movement, for the first time, stirred a strong anti-British feeling in Bengal and destroyed the myth of British invincibility, thus facilitating the work of later nationalist leaders. When Gandhi started the non-violent, non-co-operation movement, the field was prepared for defying the government and courting arrest and imprisonment in hundreds and thousands. It was not the Congress but the revolutionaries who first enumerated the doctrine of *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence from British rule, and thus provided our national struggle with a political objective worth striving for. Thus, judged from the historical perspective, the revolutionaries served a very important historical purpose. It is true that they failed to achieve final victory against the British government. Nevertheless, by their heroic self-sacrifice and daring activities, they stunned the British government to such an extent, that the latter was compelled to think seriously of introducing some sort of responsible government in India to prevent a popular upsurge in the country. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 may be regarded as an indirect consequence of the revolutionary movement. By embracing martyrdom in a fearless manner they created a legacy of heroism which was followed in right earnest by the later generation of freedom-fighters. Their attempts to secure foreign support against the British government was later emulated by Subhas Chandra Bose, one of our greatest national leaders, during the Second World War.

The source materials for this dissertation have been collected in the first instance from different published works on the Bengal Revolutionaries, written by both Indian and European historians. Such books include biographies of the revolutionary leaders as well as contemporary accounts of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. I have also studied some contemporary newspapers and periodicals which are available in the National Library, Calcutta, such as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1902-1919) and the *Bande Mataram* (1906-08) which is available in microfilm. I have gone through the *Sedition Committee's Report* (1918) compiled by Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt which gives much valuable information based on Intelligence reports about the Bengal revolutionaries. I have studied the unpublished autobiographical accounts of some revolutionaries relevant to the period of my work which are available in the archives of the Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta. I have looked up the Government Home Political Records (both confidential and non-confidential) as well as statements and history-sheets of the Bengal revolutionaries, available in the West



Bengal State Archives in Calcutta. As regards oral evidence necessary for my research work, I have personally met some of the Bengal Revolutionaries who are still alive and residing in Calcutta, and interviewed them in order to ascertain their ideas and motives for participating in the revolutionary movement. In the National Archives in New Delhi, I have consulted the Government Home Political records (1902-'20) containing three types of materials e.g., (a) Fortnightly confidential reports from the different provinces; (b) history sheets of the individual revolutionaries; and (c) statements elicited by the police from the individual participants in the movement, as well as the Curzon-Hamilton correspondence (microfilmed), Lala Lajpat Rai's diary (microfilmed) and the Zetland papers (microfilmed). I have also studied the *Dawn* monthly magazine (March 1897 - November 1913, available in microfilm), the *Karmayogin* (June 1909-April, 1910, also available in microfilm), the *Bande Mataram* (weekly 1907-1908, in microfilm), the *Indu Prakash*, weekly (1893-95, microfilmed) and many other manuscripts and transcripts relating to the Bengal revolutionary movement which are available in the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to the authorities of the University Grants Commission who provided me with a Junior Research Fellowship for undertaking the present research work. My thanks are also due to the staff of the National Library, the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture Library, the Aurobindo Bhavan Library, the Jadavpur University Library, the Institute of Historical studies Library, and the West Bengal State Archives, in Calcutta as well as those of the National Archives and the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. Finally, I must express my gratitude to ex-revolutionaries like Sri Jibantara Haldar, Sri Ganesh Ghosh, Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly, Sri Sunil Das, Sri Kiron Das and Sm. Bina Bhowmik who very kindly agreed to sit for interview and gave me some new and valuable information regarding the subject matter of my book. But above all, I express my deepest regard to my supervisor, Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee, Professor of Jadavpur University, whose able guidance and expert supervision at every step of my research work has made my book possible.

**Dr. Dalia Ray**

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# **1**

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

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During the first two decades of its existence the Indian National Congress was dominated by the moderates. Belonging mostly to the educated upper middle class, they confined their demands mainly to representative government and a few political rights of the educated Indians. But the British Government's indifferent attitude towards these demands and the ultimate failure of the moderates' policy of prayer and petition created a strong opposition both within and outside the Congress. Finally, Lord Curzon's scheme of partition of Bengal (1905) which was forcibly carried out in the teeth of a widespread and vociferous opposition of the Bengali people discredited the moderates in the eyes of their countrymen, and gave the nationalist politics a push towards extremism. As a result, an extremist wing developed in the nationalist movement during the last decade of the 19th century which led to the birth of the revolutionary movement in Bengal at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Surveying the factors that led to the growth of the revolutionary or militant nationalist movement in Bengal, we find that there prevailed at this time a strong economic discontent among the middle and lower middle classes in Bengal. The extreme costliness of the administration, utterly out of proportion to the means of the people, the growing poverty of the masses resulting from the most ruthless economic exploitation practised by the British Government, which also made them an easy prey to famine and disease, the growing burden of taxation, the general subordination of Indian interests to those of the ruling race and similar other evils of the British rule began to be realized with a growing sense of wrong and injustice. Such was the state



of affairs in the midst of which the national consciousness was aroused as never before, by the European agitation against the Ilbert Bill. This marked the beginning of the struggle for Swaraj.<sup>1</sup> In the sphere of agriculture, the British impact succeeded for the first time in destroying the age-old pattern of self-sufficiency which led to immense suffering among the peasantry who were steadily impoverished.<sup>2</sup> The new English-educated middle class or the *bhadralok* class, as they were called, imbued with western ideas of democracy and freedom,<sup>3</sup> gradually lost faith in the ideal of constitutional agitation preached by the Congress, and became utterly frustrated and bitter. In spite of adequate educational qualifications and administrative experience, they were denied all high posts of the British bureaucracy.<sup>4</sup> They felt that the only remedy to their grievances lay in ousting the British from India by force.

The growth of revolutionary activities in Bengal was also greatly influenced by the religio-political ideas of Swami Vivekananda and the inspiration of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's celebrated novel, *Anandamath*, (The Abbey of Bliss) published in 1882. In this novel Bankim narrates some events, supposed to have taken place during the so-called Sannyasi Rebellion (1772-1774). The novel describes a band of patriots who called themselves *santans* (i.e., children) of the motherland, and who, at the time of their initiation, had to take a vow to renounce their hearth and home and devote themselves to the service of their motherland. Many ideas were afterwards borrowed from this novel by the leaders of the Bengal revolutionary societies and the special vow taken by the members of the Anushilan Samiti was practically the same as that imposed upon the *santans* in *Anandamath*.<sup>5</sup> In Bankim's novel the *santans* were apparently engaged in a conflict with the oppressive Muslim rulers of their country, but there is hardly any doubt that Bankim's real target of attack, under a thin veil, was the British rulers of our land.<sup>6</sup> Bankim also gave the revolutionaries the mantra of 'Bande Mataram' (Hail mother).<sup>7</sup> Though Bankim had composed the 'Bande Mataram' song earlier in 1875 but in this novel,

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1. R.G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle for Swaraj*, (Madras, 1930), pp. 15-17.

2. Karan Singh, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay, 1970), pp. 8-9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

4. Arun Coomer Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, (Allahabad, 1971), p. 1.

5. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, (Calcutta, 1973), pp. 29-30.

6. B.B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, (Calcutta, 1966), pp. 12-13.

7. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30.

it became the sacred hymn for the worship of the new Goddess, the Motherland. It ultimately transformed nationalism into a new religion.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore the cult of 'Nishkama Karma' of the Gita as explained and popularised by Bankim supplied the moral background to the Bengal revolutionaries.<sup>9</sup>

The militant nationalist movement in Bengal drew its spiritual sustenance from the teachings of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902).<sup>10</sup> Vivekananda, himself a monk, following the footsteps of his religious preceptor, Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-'86) held before his countrymen the image of Kali, the Goddess of strength and destruction.<sup>11</sup> He propagated in his unique way love for ones' own people and country as well as the ideal of self-sacrifice for the sake of the motherland. In a lecture, entitled the "Future of India", which he delivered in Madras in February 1897, Vivekananda asked his countrymen to worship only one God for the next fifty years and this one God would be Mother India. To him, weakness and slavery were symptoms of the death of a nation.<sup>12</sup> Swami Vivekananda taught his countrymen to awaken and arouse the masses, especially the so-called untouchables of the society, and to realize the truth that God dwells in the soul of everyman, irrespective of caste, creed, birth or wealth.<sup>13</sup> In a speech delivered by him in Calcutta in 1897, he said "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached", and expressed his abiding faith in the youth of the country.<sup>14</sup> Though Vivekananda was not openly allied with any political group in the country, the whole tenor of his teaching was directed towards bringing about a profound resurgence in the Indian society. He gave his countrymen an added sense of dignity and pride in their own culture. This could not fail to have political repercussions,<sup>15</sup> and we find that many Bengali revolutionaries from Aurobindo to Subhas Chandra Bose were profoundly influenced and inspired by Vivekananda's teachings. Harikumar Chakravarty, an important revolutionary leader, while in jail in 1918 in Dacca, told the police that there was in fact no

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8. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

9. A.C. Guha, *The First Spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 63.

10. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 57.

11. Kali Charan Ghosh, *The Roll of Honour*, (Calcutta, 1965), p. 31.

12. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 39, 43, 46, 57.

13. Asit K. Bandyopadhyaya, Sankari Prasad Basu & Shankar (eds.), *Visva Vivek*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 144-145.

14. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 198.

15. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.



revolutionary leader in Bengal who was not inspired by Swamiji's ideas.<sup>16</sup> Vivekananda's works were actually found by the police in the possession of many revolutionaries in the early 19th century.<sup>17</sup> Vivekananda's propagation of the ideal of social service or service to the poor as the best possible way of serving God opened a new dimension of activity to the Bengal revolutionaries.<sup>18</sup> He taught that what was most urgently needed for the motherland, was strength<sup>19</sup> and the basis of formation of the society and nation was the development of a man's personality. So he always used to say, "Man-making is my mission".<sup>20</sup> He was perhaps the only Hindu monk to assert that men with strong biceps could come nearer to God through football rather than through the Gita".<sup>21</sup> Harikumar Chakravarty writes in his essay on Swamiji, "...Vivekananda's *Karmayoga* and *Bartaman Bharat* set before us the ideal to be followed and the method of work".<sup>22</sup> It is significant that the *Sedition Committee's Report* (1918) begins the account of the revolutionary activities in Bengal with a narration of the life and teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his great disciple Swami Vivekananda.<sup>23</sup>

Another important fact, which must be noted, is the profound influence of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's (1856-1920) political ideas on the Bengal revolutionaries like Bepin Chandra Pal, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya and Aurobindo Ghose. Militant nationalism in India first originated in Maharashtra, and Tilak became the father of Indian militant nationalism.<sup>24</sup> His early efforts and sufferings in Maharashtra had made his name dear all over the country, and he soon captured the imagination of the Bengalis and placed himself at the crest of the rising tide of Bengali patriotism.<sup>25</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries believed in complete freedom (or *Purna Swaraj*) from British rule and not self-government within the British Empire which became the objective of the Congress in 1906.

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16. Asit K. Bandyopadhyaya, S.P. Basu & Shandar (eds.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 246.

17. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.

18. Asit K. Bandyopadhyaya, S.P. Basu & Shankar (eds.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 183.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

21. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

22. Asit K. Bandyopadhyaya, S.P. Basu & Shankar (eds.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 248.

23. Justice Rowlatt (eds.) *Sedition Committee's Report*, 1918, pp. 16-17, para 24.

24. M.A. Buch, *Rise & Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism*, (Baroda, 1940), p. 24.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 44.



The war between Russia and Japan formally declared on February 8, 1904, and the decisive victory won by Japan in this struggle were followed with the keenest interest by the Indian people. The educated class and, in particular, the student community in Bengal began to study the history of Japan and to enquire into the causes that made her so great and powerful in a short time and enabled her to inflict a crushing defeat upon one of the greatest military powers of the West. The rise of Japan as a free nation heralded the dawn of a new era of freedom and power for all the enslaved nations of the East.<sup>26</sup> Japan's victory over Russia also destroyed for the first time the myth of the invincibility of the Western powers.

The year 1905 constitutes one of the great land-marks in the history of Indian nationalism. The partition of Bengal in 1905 gave the signal for anti-government agitation all over the country. The people of Bengal saw in this a direct attack on their growing national solidarity and a deliberate attempt to put the Hindus and the Mohammedans against one another.<sup>27</sup> The partition set the nation ablaze. The extremists in Bengal were waiting for an opportune moment to launch their campaign, and the partition provided them with this opportunity.<sup>28</sup> From December 1903, to October 1905, more than 2000 public meetings in protest against the partition attended both by the Hindus and the Muslims, were held in different parts of Bengal. The Indian, press both within and outside Bengal, as well as a large section of the Anglo-Indian press joined in this protest.<sup>29</sup> In this opposition to the partition of Bengal, the Hindus were supported by the Muslims at least in the initial stage. But Lord Curzon won over *Salimullah*, the Nawab of Dacca, partly by advancing a loan at a very low rate of interest and partly by assuring him that the interest of the Muslim community would be better served in the newly created province of East Bengal and Assam, and that the Nawab himself would hold a unique position there. As a result, the Nawab became a great supporter of the partition and won over a large section of the Muslims to his side.<sup>30</sup> This anti-Swadeshi

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26. R.G. Pradhan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 75-76.

27. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 33-34.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

29. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 8.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

attitude, deliberately encouraged by the Nawab of Dacca and connived at, if not instigated by British officials, culminated in a series of communal riots in East Bengal, the most serious of which occurred at Comilla and Jamalpur (1907).<sup>31</sup> The Government took no steps to punish the offenders.<sup>32</sup>

The partition immediately led to the Swadeshi and Boycott movements which emphasized on the use of indigenous goods and boycott of English goods as far as practicable.<sup>33</sup> Picketing of shops selling foreign goods was started, and parties of school and college-going students all over Bengal paraded the local markets in the towns and villages in order to prevent the customers from purchasing foreign goods. There is no denying the fact that the spirit of boycott moved the people, both high and low.<sup>34</sup> Though the initiative for the Swadeshi movement had been taken by moderate leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Krishna Kumar Mitra and Aswini Kumar Datta, yet in 1907-'08 when the failure of constitutional agitation to undo the partition became evident, extremist leaders like Bepin Chandra Pal, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya and Aurobindo Ghose took over the leadership of the movement.

The Dawn Society (founded in 1902) which, under the leadership of Satish Chandra Mukherjee, had been functioning as a training ground for youth, became in 1905 one of the most active centres for the propagation of the ideas of Swadeshi and Boycott.<sup>35</sup> Its mouthpiece, *The Dawn*, had been started as a monthly magazine by Satish Chandra Mukherjee as early as 1897 in collaboration with his friend Ajayhari Banerjee. Originally published as an organ of the Bhagavat Chatuspathi, it became from 1902 onward an organ of the Dawn Society and afterwards, an organ of the swadeshi movement itself. The spirit of the journal was cosmopolitan and all-embracing, and it intended to be a vehicle of higher Eastern and Western culture, particularly religion, philosophy and science. In its first phase, it published religious and philosophical writings as well as articles on science, history, economics, sociology and education, and thereby propagated India's moral and

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31. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 21.



spiritual values. Articles were contributed by some of the greatest thinkers of the time such as Mrs. Annie Besant, Bepin Chandra Pal, Sister Nivedita, Jadunath Sarkar, Brojendra Nath Seal, Radha Kumud Mukherjee, Sir George Birdwood and many others. Satish Chandra sought to make his countrymen aware of the needs of the modern age and to foster in them a patriotic spirit which showed respect to the best heritage of the land. He also preached the idea that India had a spiritual mission to fulfill, which was in consonance with the spirit of the teachings of Vivekananda. The journal made a deep impression on contemporary Bengali thought and caused a stir among the intellectuals of the time. In its second phase, the *Dawn*, through its 'Indiana' series of articles, preached the idea, "To love the country, one must know the country." Thus the *Dawn*, in its various phases, from 1897 to 1913, moulded the patriotic temper of our countrymen, specially among the student community and served as a mouthpiece of the swadeshi movement and of national education.<sup>36</sup> A swadeshi store was also opened, under the auspices of the Dawn Society in 1903, to promote genuine interests of the students in the indigenous industries.<sup>37</sup> The Dawn Society, though not a secret revolutionary organisation, was certainly an organisation which nurtured the revolutionary spirit and the urge for independence. Most of its members, later on, sympathised with the cause of the revolutionaries and developed contacts with them.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of the split among the nationalist leaders of Bengal over the issue of national education, the extreme group headed by Gurudas Banerjee, Satish Chandra Mukherjee and others, set up the Bengal National College and School on August 14th, 1906, while the moderate group, led by Tarak Nath Palit, founded the Bengal Technical Institute on July 25th, 1906.<sup>39</sup>

The Congress of 1906, which assembled in Calcutta was itself an important landmark in India's struggle for freedom. It adopted the resolutions on Boycott, Swadeshi and national education. The moderate leaders ceased to enjoy the traditional respect and

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36. *The Dawn*, March, 1897 - August, 1913, microfilmed, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (New Delhi).

37. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

38. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 89.

39. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 80.

obedience.<sup>40</sup> The final split between the moderates and the extremists took place at the 23rd annual session of the Congress at Surat which commenced on 26th December 1907.<sup>41</sup> There is no doubt that the Surat split gave a great impetus to the revolutionary spirit of India, opening the way to terrorism.<sup>42</sup>

The growth of *Samitis* or associations served as an important factor in translating the revolutionary spirit into action.<sup>43</sup> There was a widespread belief among the Indians outside Bengal that the Bengalis were peace-loving, in-offensive and incapable of physical exertion. It seems that the youth of Bengal were now determined to wipe out this stigma once for all by acts of daring and heroic sacrifice.<sup>44</sup> Some noted persons in Calcutta established *akharas* or gymnasiums at different places where physical training was given to the youth.<sup>45</sup> Later on, these centres of physical training, under the influence of militant nationalism were transformed into political societies whose activities were partly secret and partly open. Under the garb of schools of physical training, which trained the youth in gymnastics, drill, riding, boxing, lathi-play, use of swords and so on, the members of such centres secretly resorted to terroristic activities with bombs and fire-arms, thereby following the example of the secret revolutionary societies of the West, particularly those of Russia, Italy and Ireland. The aim of the Bengal revolutionaries was to strike terror into the hearts of the British by committing overt acts and thereby to oust them from the country by the use of force and violence. Hence, its very nature of work required the revolutionary societies in Bengal to function in complete secrecy or to remain underground.

It is reported from official sources that the idea of establishing a physical force party among the Bengalis appears to have been first put into practical shape by Sarala Devi (Ghosal - 1873-1950).<sup>46</sup> She opened an academy at Ballygunge, in Calcutta (1902), where Bengali youths were instructed in fencing and *jiu-jitsu* by a professional swordsman,

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40. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

42. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 126.

43. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 110.

44. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 164.

45. Sir Jibantara Halder, *Anushilan Samiti Itihas*, (Calcutta, 1950), p. 3.

46. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.



named Murtaza. As a result, wrestling and lathi-play, formerly the weapons of the lower classes, now became fashionable among educated youngmen belonging to the well-to-do or *Bhadralok* class of Bengal.<sup>47</sup> In October 1902, she started the Birastami festival, as part of her programme of physical training for youngmen. In the following year, at her initiative, the Pratapaditya Utsav in memory of Maharaja Pratapaditya of Jessore, was started in imitation of the Shivaji festival organized by Tilak in Maharashtra.<sup>48</sup>

Aurobindo Ghose, then employed in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda, sent Jatindranath Banerjee (1877 - 1930) who had been serving in the Gaikwad's army to Calcutta in 1902, with a letter of introduction to Sarala Devi, with a view to organizing the revolutionary movement in Bengal.<sup>49</sup> He set up a club at 106, Upper Circular Road, in North Calcutta, where the youngmen were taught lathi-play, fencing, riding and so on. Aurobindo's brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Abinash Bhattacharya and the Marathi scholar-revolutionary, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar were also associated with this club.<sup>50</sup> On 24th March 1902, the Anushilan Samiti was established in Calcutta by Satish Chandra Bose, with the well-known barrister Pramatha Mitra as its president. It was first located in No. 21, Madan Mitra Lane and afterwards in 1905, its office was shifted to No. 49, Cornwallis Street.<sup>51</sup> The Samiti took its name from the title of Bankim Chandra's famous work, *Anushilan Tattva*. The ostensible purpose of founding this Samiti was to develop physical strength and courage among the young Bengalis. It had also an intellectual side because regular classes were held.<sup>52</sup> Various subjects were discussed in these classes such as the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, the American War of Independence, the Italian War of Liberation, the Sepoy Mutiny, Maratha and Sikh histories, rise of the Dutch Republic, political science, religion and Indian economics. Lectures were delivered by eminent persons including C.R. Das, Aurobindo Ghose, Sister Nivedita (Vivekananda's Irish disciple), Sakharam Deuskar, and Swami Vivekananda's brother-monk Swami

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47. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

48. Sankar Ghosh (ed.), *First Rebels*, (Calcutta, 1981), p. 282.

49. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 101.

50. A.B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, (Pondicherry, 1958), p. 68.

51. Jibantara Haldar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

52. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 83-84.



Saradananda.<sup>53</sup> Special attention was paid to the acquisition of moral and spiritual knowledge, and the young recruits had to attend classes on the *Gita* regularly.<sup>54</sup> The executive committee of the Anushilan Samiti was shortly re-constituted with P. Mitra as its president, Chitta Ranjan Das and Aurobindo as its vice-presidents and Surendranath Tagore as its treasurer.<sup>55</sup> The members of the Samiti were also sent from time to time to flood-affected or famine-stricken areas for relief work. In order to help the needy and the poor, the Samiti members even used to beg alms from door to door, and distribute them among the orphans and widows. For this purpose a separate department within the Samiti called 'Daridra Bandhab Bhandar' (Poor Friends' Store) was created. All the members of the Samiti had to be initiated by taking certain vows in the name of Goddess Kali and they promised to maintain secrecy.<sup>56</sup> Though there was an amalgamation between the Baroda group and the Anushilan Samiti at first, differences soon arose between Jatindranath Bandopadhyaya and Barindra as a result of which the former left the Samiti.<sup>57</sup>

From 1906 the secret wing of the Anushilan Samiti under Barindra Kumar Ghose, Upendranath Banerjee, Ullaskar Dutta and others began working in a garden house in Manicktola in the eastern suburb of Calcutta.<sup>58</sup> Barindra and his three colleagues namely Bhupendranath Dutta, Debabrata Bose, Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, brought out the weekly paper *Yugantar* in March, 1906, which soon became the chief exponent of the cult of militant nationalism in Bengal. A group of revolutionaries called Yugantar group was also built up quickly round this paper.<sup>59</sup>

Soon the influence of the Anushilan Samiti spread far and wide. Its branches were set up not only in the different localities of Calcutta and its suburbs but also in the villages of Bengal. Among these branches, those established at Darjipara, Pataldanga, Grey Street, Khidderpore, Howrah, Shalikhah and Shibpur, are worth mentioning.<sup>60</sup>

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53. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

54. Jibantara Halldar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 12-13.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

58. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 87.

59. Uma Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, (Calcutta, 1966), p. 18.

60. J. Jalldar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 9-10.

Definite evidence is available regarding the work of the Anushilan Samiti in Assam, Bihar, Punjab, United Provinces, Central Provinces and Bombay.<sup>61</sup> In 1905 the Dacca Anushilan Samiti was set up under the control and supervision of Pulin Behari Das.<sup>62</sup> There was however, a difference between the Dacca Anushilan Samiti and that in Calcutta which functioned in the open. The latter was more concerned with physical culture and social work, while the former concentrated on building a militant group for armed uprising and for overt acts like dacoity and murder.<sup>63</sup> While the organisation of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti was the most compact in Mymensingh and Dacca, it was fairly active from Dinajpur in the North-West to Chittagong in the South-East and from Cooch-Bihar in the North-East to Midnapore in the South-West,<sup>64</sup> and it had about 500 units or branches, mostly in rural areas.<sup>65</sup> The other societies of this type were the Atmonnati Samiti of Calcutta, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti (1905) of Bakharaganj, the Brati Samiti of Faridpur and the Suhrid (1900) and Sadhana Samitis of Mymensingh (1906).<sup>66</sup>

Simultaneously with the growth of revolutionary societies, there was the growth of a revolutionary press which became the chief organ of propagation of revolutionary ideas. In this connection, it is relevant to point out that long before the growth of the revolutionary press, the seeds of revolution were nurtured by the constant flow of patriotic ideas emanating from the pens of a band of Bengali writers (in both poetry and prose), such as Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyay (1873), Jyotirindra Nath Tagore (1874), Rangalal Bandyopadhyay (1858), Raj Narain Bose, Sivanath Sastri and so on.<sup>67</sup> On 16th December 1904, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay started the paper *Sandhya* (Twilight) an evening Bengali daily and the first of its kind in Bengal which began to preach the cult of force and violent action as the best means for driving out the British.<sup>68</sup> Bepin Chandra Pal started a weekly magazine, called

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61. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 298.

62. J. Haldar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 10-11.

63. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 107.

64. *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918, para 96.

65. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 155.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

67. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 26-30.

68. Buddhadev Bhattacharya (ed.) *Freedom Struggle and Anushilan Samiti*, Vol. I, (Calcutta, 1979), p. 36.



*New India* in August 1901, and an English weekly, the *Bande Mataram* in August 1906. These two papers became the guiding force of the new nationalist movement and preached the ideals of Swadeshi, Swaraj, self-help and self-sacrifice.<sup>69</sup> Later on at Bepin Pal's request, Aurobindo undertook the direction of the paper *Bande Mataram* during Pal's absence, when he went on a tour of the districts. However, after a time, dissensions arose between Pal and other contributors of the paper and Aurobindo became the editor of this paper.<sup>70</sup> The *Bande Mataram* (November 1906) indirectly preached the cult of violence,<sup>71</sup> upheld the attainment of complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and declared a new political programme for the country.<sup>72</sup> The *Nava Sakti*, a Bengali daily of Monoranjan Guha Thakurta was also devoted to the same cause.<sup>73</sup> But the most celebrated mouthpiece of the revolutionary ideas was the *Yugantar* (New Era), a weekly organ started in March 1906, as mentioned above. The *Yugantar* was a paper for the common man, and therefore it was written in colloquial Bengali.<sup>74</sup> The *Yugantar* openly condemned the alien government, advocated the use of physical force and justified bloodshed as a religious duty. It put forward a concrete scheme for achieving India's independence by advocating the idea of forming secret revolutionary societies for the purpose of revolutionary propaganda and action. Such societies were to collect money by means of political dacoities and secret collection from rich sympathizers, to manufacture bombs in secret places, import fire-arms and ammunitions from abroad, and terrorise the government and the bureaucracy. Side by side with this the *Yugantar* also preached the idea of organising a popular movement on a mass basis by building up public opinion.<sup>75</sup> Besides these papers, some revolutionary pamphlets, written during this period, became a great source of inspiration to the Bengal revolutionaries. Aurobindo Ghose wrote a pamphlet called *Bhawani Mandir* in August 1905, in which he set forth the aims and objects of the

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69. A.P. Mookherjee, *Social and Political Ideas of B.C. Pal*, (Calcutta, 1974), pp. 60-61.

70. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 225-226.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

73. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 50.

74. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

revolutionaries. The teachings in *Bhawani Mandir* combined the Russian method of revolutionary violence with the principles advocated in it.<sup>76</sup> The other pamphlets worth mentioning were Sister Nivedita's *Kali, the Mother* (1900), *Bartaman Rananiti* (i.e, the modern art of war) published in October 1907, by Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya which exhorted the youth of the country to conquer fear and be ready to face death,<sup>77</sup> and *Mukti Kon Pathe* (which way lies salvation?) which suggested the means of raising funds for the deliverance of the country from the foreign yoke and reprinted many important articles of the *Yugantar*.<sup>78</sup> In order to put a stop to such revolutionary propaganda, the government started a large number of prosecutions under the existing law of sedition against the editors marked for their outspokenness. The first to be prosecuted was Bhupendranath Dutta, editor of the *Yugantar*, for an article appearing in its issue of June 16, 1907. He was arrested in 1907 and the open circulation of the paper was stopped by the government.<sup>79</sup> The *Yugantar* suffered from five prosecutions and the last issue of the paper came out in July 1908.<sup>80</sup> In 1907 Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was also charged with sedition, but he refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the British Court.<sup>81</sup> In the same year the *Bande Mataram* was also prosecuted.<sup>82</sup> But prosecution could not curb the spirit of revolt, it merely drove the revolutionary literature into secret channels. The first pamphlet of this nature was *Sonar Bangla* an anonymous leaflet secretly printed in the Sandhya Press.<sup>83</sup> In June 1909, Aurobindo started a weekly magazine, called the *Karmayogin* (The Devotee of Action)<sup>84</sup>, in which he propagated the idea of Karmayoga which meant the application of Vedanta and Yoga to life and seeking the eternal source of strength in ourselves. He asserted that India would get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness by Karmayoga.<sup>85</sup>

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76. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 130-131.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

80. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 154.

81. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 145.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

83. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 118.

84. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 79.

85. *Karmayogin*, 5th Ashadh, 1316 B.E. (microfilmed).



In 1906, the Shivaji festival was celebrated in Calcutta and was attended by Tilak.<sup>86</sup> The existence of secret societies, for the purpose of assassination and revolutionary crime, first became an accepted fact in Bengal at the end of the year 1907, when an attempt was made to wreck the special train of Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, at Naraingarh in the Midnapore district on 7th December 1907, and the train was actually derailed by a bomb near Midnapore.<sup>87</sup>

In April 1908, a bomb was thrown into the house of the Mayor of Chandernagore, but no one was injured. On 30th April 1908, a bomb was thrown at Muzaffarpur, Bihar, into the carriage of two European ladies, Mrs. and Miss Kennedy, wife and daughter of Pringle Kennedy, a leading pleader of the Muzaffarpur bar. Both of them were killed.<sup>88</sup> But the bomb which was hurled at these ladies travelling in a covered carriage, was actually meant for Kingsford, District Judge of Muzaffarpur, who had previously, as the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta (from August 1904 to March 1908), inflicted merciless punishments on all who showed signs of patriotism in their action or in their writings.<sup>89</sup> Two young men, Khudiram Basu of Midnapore and Profulla Chaki of Rangpur, both teenagers, committed this overt action. Khudiram was arrested, sentenced to death and hanged in the Muzaffarpur jail; while Profulla shot himself to death. By their death they became immortal in the eyes of their countrymen and came to be regarded as the first great Bengali martyrs in the cause of independence. Their death touched the heart of Bengal, specially of the women of Bengal and set an example of self-sacrifice for the cause of the motherland.<sup>90</sup> On 2nd May 1908, searches were made in the house at 32, Muraripukur Road, Manicktola in North Calcutta, usually known as the Manicktola Garden House, which revealed the existence of a secret revolutionary organization, in possession of a large quantity of bombs and other fire-arms which had hatched a conspiracy to overthrow the established government by force. This is called the Muraripukur Conspiracy or the Alipur Conspiracy Case, which was the first of a series of sensational conspiracy trials. A

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86. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 148.

87. Sankar Ghose (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

88. Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt, *Sedition Committee's Report*, 1918, p. 23.

89. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 160.

90. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 130-132.

large number of revolutionaries including Barindra Kumar Ghose, Hem Chandra Das Kanungo and others were found guilty and sentenced to transportation for life and ten others to terms varying from five to seven years of imprisonment. Aurobindo himself was, however acquitted, thanks to the brilliant advocacy of his counsel, C.R. Das.<sup>91</sup> Narendra Gossain, the approver in this case, was shot dead in jail on 31st August 1908, by Kanailal Dutta and Satyen Basu, two revolutionaries who had also been under-trial prisoners, but who managed to get arms smuggled in. Both of them were placed on trial for murder and hanged.<sup>92</sup> As regards the question as to who supplied the revolvers to Kanai and Satyen, A.C. Guha writes in his *First Spark of Revolution* that though there is a controversy, yet "from the evidence available to us, we can safely say that Sirish Ghose and Basanta Banerjee, both belonging to Chandernagore, would be fully justified in claiming the credit for actually smuggling the revolver in the Alipore Jail, and we have verified it from all possible sources."<sup>93</sup> On 24th January 1910, Shamsul Alam, a Deputy Superintendant of Police, was shot dead while leaving the Calcutta High Court, where he was attending the hearing of the appeal in the Alipore Case.<sup>94</sup>

During 1907-'08 the Dacca Anushilan Samiti committed a number of violent acts, of which the most daring was the dacoity committed at Barrah, in the Dacca district on 2nd June 1908.<sup>95</sup> The dacoity is believed to have been really the work of Pulin Das, the head of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti.<sup>96</sup> A number of dacoities were committed during the years 1909-'11. The more important among them were the Rajendrapur train dacoity in the district of Dacca, the Nagla dacoity in the district of Khulna, the dacoity at Haldia in the Dacca district, and that at Haludbari in Nadia.<sup>97</sup> Two daring crimes were also committed in the streets of Calcutta by the revolutionaries in 1911. On 21st February 1911, Head Constable Srish Chandra Chakravarti, attached to the Calcutta Criminal Investigation Department, was shot dead in Calcutta

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91. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-139.

92. Sankar Ghose (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 39-40.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

94. Justice Rowlatt, *Sedition Committee Report*, 1918, p. 33.

95. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 28-29.

96. Sankar Ghosh (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 33.

97. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 155.



and there is reason to believe that he was murdered by a member of the gang known as the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti. On 2nd March 1911, a bomb was thrown into the motor car of an European gentleman named Cowley, by a boy of sixteen who was arrested on the spot. Though the bomb did not explode, it is certain that the bomb was intended for Mr. Denham, a prominent officer of the Criminal Investigation Department of Calcutta. In 1912, two further dacoities were committed by the Dacca Anushilan Samiti at Panam and Nagaland in the Dacca district.<sup>98</sup> During 1913 two more police officers were murdered and a series of ten successful dacoities were committed. All these had the features of *bhadralok* dacoities, and in all of them the dacoits carried fire-arms, making effective resistance impossible.<sup>99</sup>

But the most daring and dramatic overt act committed during these years was the theft of arms in broad daylight (on the way from the Customs Warehouse) of Messrs. Rodda and Company of Calcutta. This exploit was carried out by the members of the Mukti Sangha and the Atmonnati Samiti under the leadership of Bepin Behari Ganguly and Anukul Mukherji on 27th August 1914.<sup>100</sup> The consignment stolen included 50 Mauser pistols and 46,000 cartridges.<sup>101</sup> This theft may be considered as a landmark in the revolutionary history of Bengal. The stolen Mauser pistols gave a new turn to the revolutionary movement in Bengal, for they were distributed among the members of different revolutionary organisations in the province who used them freely in the overt acts committed in the subsequent years.<sup>102</sup> Of the Road murders committed, the first in order of date, was the Chitpur Road murder in which Inspector Nripendra Ghosh of the C.I.D. department of the Calcutta Police was attacked by youngmen armed with pistols, while alighting from a tram car. On 25th November 1915, an attempt was made to murder the Deputy Superintendent Basanta Chatterjee by throwing two bombs into his house and outside it.<sup>103</sup>

In Calcutta, the first of the taxicab dacoities took place on 12th February 1915, at Garden Reach, a suburb of Calcutta. The money

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98. Justice Rowlatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 36-38.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

100. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 365-367.

101. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 247.

102. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 365-367.

103. Justice Rowlatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 44.



belonged to Messrs. Bird and Company - a British firm. It was carried out under the direct supervision of Jatindra Nath Mukherjee and Bepin Behari Ganguly. But Naren Bhattacharya, later known as M.N. Roy, actually led it. The taxicab dacoities were undertaken mostly by members of the Yugantar group.<sup>104</sup> In 1915, two notable dacoities were committed in the Nadia district at Pragpur and Shibpur, which were carried out from Calcutta by men armed with Mauser pistols.<sup>105</sup>

The British government enacted various repressive legislations between 1908 and 1910, in order to curb revolutionary outrages. On 1st November 1907, the government in order to put an end to anti-British propaganda and preaching of revolutionary ideas promulgated the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act.<sup>106</sup> On 8th June 1908, was passed the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act which provided for the forfeiture of presses in which were printed newspapers containing incitement to murder or to any offence under the Explosive Substances Act of 1908.<sup>107</sup> In December 1908, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed. It became better known as the 'Samitis' Act. By this Act all the important 'Samitis' of Bengal were declared unlawful and a form of summary trial for political offences were introduced. The Calcutta Anushilan Samiti, the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Barisal, the Brati Samiti of Faridpur, the Suhrid Samiti and the Sadhana Samiti of Mymensingh were all declared illegal in January 1909.<sup>108</sup> The Indian Press Act was passed in 1910 which empowered the government to demand security from publishers of newspapers and keepers of printing presses.<sup>109</sup> Besides passing these repressive acts, the government employed Regulation III of 1818 to arrest and deport. In November 1908, nine important leaders of Bengal including Aswini Kumar Dutta, Pulin Bihari Das, Subodh Chandra Mullick, Krishna Kumar Mitra and others.<sup>110</sup> With the arrest of important leaders in the Alipore Conspiracy Case, the first phase of the revolutionary movement came to an end. Though repressive measures failed to curb completely

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104. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 373-374.

105. Justice Rowlatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 48.

106. K.C. Ghosh, *Jagoran O Bishphoran*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1973), p. 291.

107. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.

108. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 141.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

the revolutionary activities, popular enthusiasm received a severe jolt. Many now realised that the British could not be ousted so easily from India, and this realisation heralded a phase of near-demoralisation and popular apathy to the movement. So by 1910, revolutionary activities in Bengal was on the wane. Almost all the prominent leaders had been arrested, imprisoned or deported from Bengal by this time while Aurobindo, after his acquittal, left for the French settlement of Pondicherry (March 1910) where he led the life of a recluse, almost cut off from active politics.<sup>111</sup> Political dacoities and murders committed by members of different revolutionary groups, however, continued till 1917.<sup>112</sup>

Revolutionary activities in Bengal again received a great impetus during the First World War (1914-'18). The movement became more widespread in character with the different revolutionary groups collaborating among themselves. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti was probably the most powerful revolutionary organization in Bengal and Eastern India during this period. The Samiti which had a centralised and well-knit organisation set up its branches in different parts of Bengal as well as in Tripura, Assam, Bihar, U.P. and the Punjab.<sup>113</sup> The Samiti was led by dedicated men like Pulin Bihari Das, Makhan Lal Sen, Naren Sen, Pratul Ganguli, Trailokya Nath Chakraborty and others. In Calcutta and in the districts of Bengal, various Samitis or organisations grew up with a vague idea of revolution, like the Brati Samiti led by Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, the Bande Mataram Sampradaya of Suresh Samajpati, the Anti-Circular Society of Krishna Kumar Mitra and Sachin Basu, the Santan Sampradaya of Rajat Ray and others, while in the mofussil, practically every district had its own organisation. They believed in the idea of achieving Indian independence through a violent revolution.<sup>114</sup> There were also the Yugantar group of revolutionaries led by Jatindra Nath Mukherjee<sup>115</sup> (who assumed leadership after the Alipore Conspiracy Case), and the Chandernagore group led by Motilal Roy. The French settlement of Chandernagore was a great centre of stockpiling arms and ammunitions and the main centre of

111. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

112. Justice Rowlatt, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 47-58.

113. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 371.

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 159.



bomb manufacture, and it gave asylum to a number of revolutionaries, beginning with Aurobindo himself (before he left for Pondicherry in March 1910). Motilal Roy later served as a link between Aurobindo and the Bengal revolutionaries for some years.<sup>116</sup>

On the eve of World War I, the Yugantar group of Bengal revolutionaries hatched a conspiracy with the German Government with the object of overthrowing the British rule in this country. This is known as the Indo-German Conspiracy of 1914-'15. In October 1911, was published Friedrich Von Bernhardt's book, *Germany and the Next War*, where he indicated the German hope that "the Hindu population of Bengal, in which a pronounced revolutionary and nationalist tendency showed itself, might unite with the Muslims of India, and that the cooperation of these elements might create a very grave danger, capable of shaking the foundations of England's high position in the world." He had also indicated in his book the prospect of the Indian revolutionaries getting assistance from Germany in the event of an Anglo-German war breaking out in Europe.<sup>117</sup> From the time of World War I, the difference between the Dacca Anushilan Samiti and the Yugantar group became prominent, particularly in their respective attitudes towards the German offer of arms. The Anushilan decided not to join the Indo-German Conspiracy,<sup>118</sup> while the different local groups in East Bengal joined hands with the Yugantar group and accepted the leadership of Jatindra Nath Mukherjee.<sup>119</sup> In September 1914, Virendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya and others met Baron Von Oppenheim, the German Foreign Minister, and obtained assurance of help in arms and money from the German Government for the purpose of organising an armed revolutionary uprising in India. A committee called the Berlin India Committee was formed to work out this plan.<sup>120</sup> The Berlin India Committee was soon transformed into the Indian Independence Committee and Hram-balal Gupta, Dr. Chandra Chakravarty and Dhirendranath Sarkar were among its members.<sup>121</sup> The Sedition Committee Report states that

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-43.

117. Buddhadev Bhattacharya (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 101.

118. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 372.

119. *Ibid.*, pp. 363-364.

120. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 101.

121. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 431.



three separate schemes were framed by the German Government for fostering a rebellion in India. Of these schemes, one that depended on Muslim disaffection was directed against the North Western frontier province, the others being the Bangkok Scheme and the Batavia Scheme.<sup>122</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries were concerned mainly with the last mentioned scheme.

Jitendranath Lahiri, a member of the Indian Independence Committee, brought the news to the Bengal revolutionaries of the offers of German help in March, 1915, and asked them to send an agent to Batavia to co-operate with the German agents. Narendranath Bhattacharya (who later became famous as M.N. Roy) was sent to Batavia to discuss plans with the Germans there. He left for Batavia in April 1915, under the pseudonym of C. Martin. Between June and August 1915, German monetary assistance (a little over Rs. 33,000/- in Indian currency) was made available to the Bengal revolutionaries. Martin also arranged for the sending of a cargo of arms and ammunitions (30,000 rifles and 400 rounds of ammunition) to Bengal, to assist the revolutionaries, on a German ship, the *Maverick*. Martin then returned to India to make arrangements to receive the cargo at Rai Mangal in the Sundarbans from where the arms would be sent secretly to Calcutta, Hatia and Balasore. Narendranath returned to India in the middle of June, and the conspirators, Jatindra Nath Mukherjee, Jadugopal Mukherjee, Narendranath Bhattacharya, Bholanath Chatterjee and Atul Ghosh drew up a plan of armed insurrection. They decided to hold up the three main railways connecting Bengal with the rest of India by blowing up the principal bridges. The Calcutta Party under Narendra Bhattacharya and Bipin Bihari Ganguly would be the first to take possession of all the arsenals in and around Calcutta and then to storm Fort William and occupy the city of Calcutta. Jadugopal Mukherjee is said to have communicated with a local zamindar in the vicinity of Rai Mangal who agreed to help him unload the German vessel.<sup>123</sup>

But the whole conspiracy met with a failure. The *Maverick* failed to contact the *Annie Larsen*, the ship from which it was to receive its cargo of arms on the high sea. The plot leaked out through Kumudnath

122. B. Bhattacharya, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 102.

123. Justice Rowlatt, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 82-83.

Mukherjee, a lawyer practising at Siam. On 7th August 1915, the police raided the office of Harry & Sons in Calcutta, and arrested its proprietor Hari Kumar Chakravarti (a close associate of Jatindra Nath Mukherjee) whose office had been the principal channel through which German monetary help was coming from Batavia. On 4th September the Universal Emporium at Balasore, a branch of Harry & Sons, was searched and this led to the detection of Jatindranath Mukherjee's hide-out at Kaptipada in the Mourbhanj state of Orissa. Jatindra Nath and his four associates tried to move out of their hide-out, but they were chased by a party of armed police, led by Charles Tegart, Commissioner of Calcutta Police, who got information and assistance from the local people. In the armed encounter which followed near the river Buri Balam on 9th September 1915, one of Jatindra's associates, Chittapriya, died on the spot while Jatindranath himself was severely wounded and died in hospital on the following day. The remaining members of the group were arrested and tried, two being hanged and the third one sentenced to transportation for life.<sup>124</sup>

During this period all attempts within and outside India for an armed rising failed. Simultaneously the repressive measures of the Government became more severe. The Defence of India Act was passed in March, 1915, under which youngmen, suspected of revolutionary connections, were arrested and detained without trial; while many revolutionaries were forcibly arrested, detained, deported or interned.<sup>125</sup> The revolutionaries now faced the most difficult days as the Government's policy of repression achieved a temporary success. By the middle of 1917, the main organisations of both the Yugantar group and the Dacca Anushilan Samiti had ceased to operate in Bengal.<sup>126</sup> A broad examination of the German arms scheme suggests that "the revolutionaries concerned were far too sanguine and that the Germans with whom they got in touch were very ignorant of the movement of which they attempted to take advantage".<sup>127</sup>

A close perusal of the events of this period (1902-1918) reveals the fact that the success of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal

124. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 172-173.

125. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 480-481.

126. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

127. Justice Rowlatt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

suffered much owing to certain weaknesses of the revolutionaries themselves as well as other weaknesses inherent in the nature of the movement itself. The revolutionaries, by working in utter secrecy, could not communicate with the common mass or the common people, who had only a vague idea of this movement and therefore failed to give any effective help or assistance to the latter. Sometimes, personal bickering and jealousy also prejudiced the thoughts and actions of the revolutionaries. Finally, as Bhupendranath Dutta, in his book, *Bharater Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, has pointed out, most of the revolutionaries had no clear idea of their political and social objects. They were not sure whether they would set up a monarchy or republic after gaining independence, and whether they wanted to join hands with the rich or the poor, the zamindars or the peasants.<sup>128</sup>

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128. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharater Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, (Calcutta, 1983), pp. 29-32.



**2**

**POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE  
BENGAL REVOLUTIONARIES**

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The Bengal extremists or nationalists, as Aurobindo Ghosh described himself and his followers, preached 'Purna Swaraj' as their political ideal, by which they implied complete or absolute political freedom from the alien rule without any dependence on the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> This new school of politicians headed by Bepin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya and others, rejected the mendicant politics of the moderates whose aim was limited to the achievement of self-government within the British Empire. The Extremists were opposed to the British rule because it was the most high-handed and unprogressive bureaucratic government composed of aliens only, subject to alien control and totally based on the foreign will imposed from outside.<sup>2</sup> They wanted a completely national government,<sup>3</sup> and opposed the idea of any political compromise with the imperialists.

It was Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who first brought in the word 'Swaraj', later adopted by the nationalists, in his book on the life of Shivaji, written in Bengali.<sup>4</sup>

Bepin Chandra Pal preached the message of swaraj in these words: "Freedom is man's birth-right. It is inherent in the very making

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1. Karan Singh, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay, 1970), p. 84.
  2. *Karmayogin*, 17th July, 1909, 1st Shraban, 1316 B.E. Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, microfilmed.
  3. M.A. Buch, *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism*, (Baroda, 1940). Vol. III, p. 76.
  4. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 61; A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 223.



of man, as God is eternally free, so are you, prince or peasant, Brahman or Pariah, man or woman, Hindu or Mohamedan, Buddhist or Christian, rich or poor, ignorant or learned, free and eternal...<sup>5</sup> The new spirit accepts no other teacher in the art of self-government except self-government itself. It values freedom for its own sake and desires autonomy, immediate and unconditioned, regardless of any consideration of fitness and unfitness of the people for it, because it does not believe in serfdom in any shape or form to be a school for real freedom in any country and under any conditions whatever..."<sup>6</sup> As far back as September, 1905, Pal wrote in his Paper, the *New India*, under the heading "Home Rule for India" supporting Shyamaji Krishnavarma's ideas of India's political freedom on the Irish model, i.e. completely free from British control. In his Madras speeches (1907), he argued against self-government of the colonial type, as it was then existing, on three grounds. First, England would not treat equally with a non-white country like India. Secondly, England was sending her surplus population to the colonies which existed for her own economic interest and exploitation and for strengthening the white suzerainty over the distant parts of the globe. Finally, England would seek to control the purse of our nation to the detriment of India's interests.<sup>7</sup> In a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, written as a sharp rejoinder to Mr. Gokhale's reported Poona speech, in which he condemned the new nationalists' talk of independence as 'madness', Pal expressed similar views about colonial self-government which he called an absolutely false ideal, so far as India was concerned.<sup>8</sup> But, it is significant to note that, on principle, Pal had no objection to colonial self-government, if some of its defects could be blotted out, and India was treated as an equal partner in the British Empire. Pal's main aim was how best to achieve the political freedom of India, be that colonial self-government or an equal partnership within the British Empire.<sup>9</sup> Here we find a dichotomy in B.C. Pal's idea of Swaraj, for he did not totally abandon the idea of colonial self-government, initiated by the moderates, while at the same time he preached the idea of achieving complete political freedom from

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5. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 88.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

7. Amalendu Prasad Mukherjee, *Social And Political Ideas of Bepin Chandra Pal*, (Calcutta, 1974), pp. 68-69.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

foreign rule. Another Extremist leader, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, proclaimed in his paper, the *Sandhya*, "We want complete independence. The country cannot prosper so long as the veriest shred of the Feringhis' supremacy over it is left".<sup>10</sup>

As early as 1893-94, Aurobindo Ghosh, in his "New Lamps for Old", published serially in the *Indu Prakash*, put forward a radical philosophy of politics. He demanded freedom openly as the inalienable birth right of India<sup>11</sup> and declared that for this emancipation India must rely on her own limitless reservoir of inner strength and power.<sup>12</sup> In a speech delivered at Jhalakati in Barisal on 19th June, 1909, Aurobindo said, "Swaraj is not the colonial form of government nor any form of government. It means the fulfilment of our national life... Our object, our claim is that we shall not perish as a nation but live as a nation... we preach the gospel of unqualified Swaraj."<sup>13</sup> Speaking on the Palli Samiti resolution at Kishoregunge on 26th April, 1908, Aurobindo said, "...What is Swaraj but the organisation of the independent life of the country into centres of strength which grow out of its conditions and answer to its needs so as to make a single and organic whole? ... If we are to organise Swaraj we must base it on the village. The village must not in our national life be isolated as well as self-sufficient, but must feel itself bound up with the life of its neighbouring units, living with them in a common group for a common purpose. The village is the cell of the national body and the cell life must be healthy and developed... Swaraj is the organisation of national self-help, national self-dependence... We must take back our lives into our own hands... Another essential condition of Swaraj is that we should awaken the political sense of the masses, on which the organization of the modern nation depends... Swaraj finally is impossible without unity of the heart and springs from love."<sup>14</sup>

Aurobindo Ghosh was the first politician in India who had the courage to declare openly this ideal of Swaraj and to preach it publicly through the pages of his journal, the *Bande Mataram*, both daily paper

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10. R.G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle for Swaraj*, (Madras, 1930), p. 84.

11. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 171.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

14. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Magazine, 26th April, 1908 (microfilmed).



and weekly magazine.<sup>15</sup> In the *Bande Mataram* paper, we have a beautiful presentation of this ideal, "God made man... essentially and potentially free and pure, ...Freedom is constitutional in man..."<sup>16</sup> The *Bande Mataram* (magazine) wrote, "we advocate the struggle for Swaraj because liberty is in itself a necessity of national life...and the first indispensable condition of national development, intellectual, moral, industrial, political...it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made and for this a free Asia and in free Asia a free India must take the lead and therefore liberty is worth striving for... India must have Swaraj in order to live well and happily and to live for the world."<sup>17</sup> If further observed, "we, nationalists, declare that man is forever and inalienably free and that we too are, both individually as Indian men and collectively as an Indian nation, for ever and inalienably free...bondage is an illusion, the rule of one nation over another is against natural law and therefore a falsehood... Nationalism is the gospel of inalienable freedom."<sup>18</sup> The motto of the *Bande Mataram* was "India for the Indians."

The *Bande Mataram* (daily) wrote, "Our position is that it is imperatively necessary for this nation to enter into an immediate struggle for national liberty which we must win at any cost"<sup>19</sup>... "Without a great ideal there can be no great movement. We need faith above all things, faith in ourselves, faith in the nation, faith in India's destiny."<sup>20</sup> Thus Aurobindo's writings throw a flood of light upon the political thought behind the revolutionary movement in Bengal.

According to Aurobindo, no real development was possible in India--be it economic, social, administrative or any other unless she was first free of foreign rulers. Hence political freedom was the *sine qua non* of all other progress of India.<sup>21</sup>

Sister Nivedita also placed freedom in the forefront of the objective of life in India. An Irish woman by birth, she had smarted

15. A.B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, (Pondicherry, 1958), p. 227.

16. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 83-84.

17. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Magazine (microfilmed), Sunday, July 7, 1907, article entitled "Europe and Asia."

18. *Ibid.*, August 4, 1907, article entitled "The Issue."

19. *Bande Mataram*, Daily, April 22, 1907.

20. *Bande Mataram*, Daily, April 25, 1907.

21. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 88.



under British oppression and taken some part in the Home Rule movement for her native land. After coming to India she identified herself heart and soul with this country, and naturally came to sympathise with the Nationalists' demand for freedom. When she explained that the essential characteristic of freedom is that it has to be realized in opposition to something, there can be little doubt about what she meant.<sup>22</sup> In the *Dawn Magazine*, (July, 1905) Sister Nivedita wrote that the essence of nationalism was to love the country, to work for the country and to share in the whole life of humanity, national or international.<sup>23</sup> There is, however, some difference of opinion regarding the extent of Nivedita's participation in the revolutionary movement in Bengal. Barindra Kumar Ghosh wrote in an article in 1931 that Nivedita presented about 100-150 books to the first revolutionary society of Bengal. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya wrote in a statement signed by himself (dated 4-4-1961) that "apart from giving books Nivedita had no other relation with our Samiti... She never taught us terrorism. Our real leader was Aurobindo Ghosh. There is no doubt about Nivedita's love of India..."<sup>24</sup> He also stated that Nivedita was not a terrorist.<sup>25</sup> In Aurobindo's own words, "...About my relations with Sister Nivedita, - they were purely in the field of politics... I met Sister Nivedita first at Baroda in 1902 when she came to give some lectures there.... I tried to unite them (i.e. small groups of revolutionaries in Bengal) under a single organisation with Barrister P. Mitra as the leader of the revolution in Bengal and a central council of five persons, one of them being Nivedita. I had no occasion to meet Nivedita after that...except once or twice at the Congress, as my collaboration with her was solely in the secret revolutionary field. I was busy with my work and she with hers, and no occasion arose for consultation or decisions about the conduct of the revolutionary movement..." (September 13, 1946).<sup>26</sup> Aurobindo is silent as to whether Nivedita accepted the membership of the Committee referred to above or whether he was successful in uniting the revolutionary groups.<sup>27</sup> It is true that Nivedita had to sever

22. B.B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, (Calcutta, 1966), p. 50.

23. *The Dawn*, July, 1905, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, (microfilmed), article entitled "Sister Nivedita on Indian National Ideals".

24. Uma and Haridas Mukhopadhyaya, *Bharater Swadhinata Andolone Yugantar Patrikar Dan*, (Calcutta, 1972), p. 197.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

26. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 66-67.

27. Uma & Haridas Mukhopadhyaya, *Op. Cit.*, p. 199.

her connections with the Ramakrishna Mission on account of her increased political activity. The official historian of the Ramakrishna Mission, however, expresses his doubts regarding Nivedita's active participation in Bengal revolutionary politics. All that we know is that just after Swamiji's passing away she travelled over some parts of Western and Southern India where she vehemently denounced India's political serfdom.<sup>28</sup> The well-known Bengali revolutionary, Bhupendranath Dutta, wrote in an essay shortly before his death that whatever relationship Nivedita had with the Bengal Revolutionaries, existed at the very beginning of the movement, for she knew only P. Mitra, Aurobindo, Suren Thakur and a few others.<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to note that many revolutionaries joined the movement at a very young age, and as a result, they did not have any clearcut and specific political ideology. This is evident from the oral interviews taken of a few surviving Bengal revolutionaries. Sri Jibantara Haldar, when interviewed, said, "I was a mere boy of twelve years when I first joined the Anushilan Samiti in 1905. I used to do mission work... At that time I did not have any political ideology. I assisted the elders in their activities according to their direction and advice... It was, so to say, the pursuit of the '*Dada* cult' - 'not to reason why but to do or die'. Our main object was to achieve freedom by ousting the Britishers from India... At that time I had no individual opinion about the movement..."<sup>30</sup> Aswini Kumar Ganguly, another Bengal revolutionary, said, "From my early childhood I had a deep hatred for the Britishers. It was this hatred which inspired me to join the revolutionary movement against the British in order to achieve freedom for India. At first I did not have any clear-cut idea of the movement... Moreover we had to act on the instructions of our leaders. What would happen in the future was exclusively for the leaders to decide upon."<sup>31</sup> Ganesh Ghosh, another revolutionary stated that in the year 1918 he was a school student and had no clear idea about the

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28. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 6; Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math And Ramakrishna Mission (Calcutta, 1957)*, p. 203.

29. Uma & Haridas Mukhopadhyaya, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 201-202.

30. Interview taken of Sri Jibantara Haldar, at his residence in Calcutta, on 28.7.1983.

31. Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly, in his residence at Calcutta, on 19.4.1983.



purpose or goal of the movement. But, under the influence of the revered 'Masterda' (Surya Sen), he joined the movement.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Bina Bhowmik, a revolutionary, who joined the movement in 1928-'29 had a definite political goal - "Our aim was to achieve *Purna Swaraj* i.e., absolute freedom, because we thought that subjugation to the British rule was the root cause of all our miseries and sufferings."<sup>33</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries preached the ideal of self-sacrifice for the purpose of achieving national independence. In their propaganda campaign through newspapers, magazines and pamphlets they urged the people to be brave and courageous, to face the British boldly and to oppose the alien oppression. At the time of their initiation the Revolutionaries had to take an oath in the names of God and their country in which they pledged their lives to the country's cause. B.C. Pal in his weekly magazine, the *New India*, started in August, 1901, propagated the ideas of self-help and self-sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> On 23rd August 1907, Aurobindo, in reply to the farewell address given to him by the students of the Bengal National College, Calcutta, said, "There are times in a nation's history when providence places before it one work, one aim to which everything else, however noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end... suffer that she may rejoice."<sup>35</sup> Aurobindo expressed similar views to another revolutionary leader Amarendra Chatterjee, "If we want to secure freedom of the country, we have to sacrifice everything for it and we should be ready to give up our life for it... We shall have to conquer the fear of death..."<sup>36</sup> Thus Aurobindo laid great stress upon the necessity for sacrifice on the part of the Indian people in order to gain India's freedom. His idea of 'purification by blood and fire', and his emphasis on the necessity of suffering and self-sacrifice, all combined to impart a revolutionary spirit to the freedom struggle.<sup>37</sup> In the Jhalakati

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32. Interview taken of Sri Ganesh Ghosh in his residence at Calcutta on 4.11.1982.

33. Interview taken of Srimati Bina Bhowmik in her residence at Calcutta on 2.7.1983.

34. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

35. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 81.

36. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 107.

37. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 106.



Conference, (1909) Aurobindo observed in course of his speech that “repression is the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation... Without suffering there can be no strength and without sacrifice there can be no growth...”<sup>38</sup> There is a religious tinge in Aurobindo’s idea of self-sacrifice. He sought the sanction of religion in order to make this idea more easily and more readily acceptable by the people at large. He further expressed the view that in order to stimulate the ideal of self-sacrifice among the people, they must be made fully aware of their great past and the achievements of their forefathers.<sup>39</sup> The *Jugantar* of March 5th, 1907, wrote,...” Dedicate your life as an offering at the temple of liberty. Without bloodshed the worship of the Goddess will not be accomplished.”<sup>40</sup> Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya appealed to the Bengali fathers to consecrate at least one of their children to the service of the motherland.<sup>41</sup> According to the *Sandhya* (March 30, 1907), “If death comes in the striving for liberation that death will be converted to immortality.”<sup>42</sup> Rashbehari Bose, being inspired by the ideal of ‘Atma Samarpana’ or self-surrender, inculcated by the *Bhagavad Gita*, took the vow of completely dedicating his life to the national cause.<sup>43</sup> Jatin Mukherjee remarked, “We shall die to awaken the nation.”<sup>44</sup>

The extremist school contained two classes of people, - those who believed that national independence could be attained at an early date by means of revolution, violence and terrorism, and therefore openly preached active resistance to the British rule, and those who believed that national freedom was a natural moral aspiration which could only be achieved in the fulness of time by a steady process of internal growth and development and therefore preached passive resistance to the British rule without violating the existing laws.<sup>45</sup> Sarala Devi took care to reiterate in her book, *Jibaner Jharapata* again and again that she was

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38. *Karmayogin*, Saturday, 3rd July, 1909.

39. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly (microfilmed), September 20th, 1908.

40. Kali Charan Ghosh, *The Roll of Honour; Anecdotes of Indian Martyrs*, (Calcutta, 1965), p. 103.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

42. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 104.

43. Uma Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, (Calcutta, 1966), p. 104.

44. A.C. Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 15.

45. R.G. Pradhan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

dead against the cult of terrorism.<sup>46</sup> Bepin Chandra Pal was also opposed to the cult of violence, and sought to gain Swaraj through total boycott of the British--their administrative machinery, law courts and educational institutions. In a letter written to the editor of the *Englishman* in 1907, Pal states, "... there is one thing that I have always strongly deprecated and that is resort to physical force in the great political conflict in which we have been thrown. My view has always been that it is a moral conflict, and in this conflict the irresponsible authority of the State must be met and opposed by the lawful and deathless determination of the people".<sup>47</sup> In this respect, there was a real difference between the extremists and the terrorists. Non-cooperation of an extreme form and passive resistance were the furthest limits of agitation to which the extremists were prepared to go. To this extent the Extremists anticipated Gandhi, though they did not share Gandhi's faith in *ahimsa* or non-violence. They simply believed that violence would not pay against the mighty British Government which was armed to the teeth. Barrister Pramatha Nath Mitter who had studied in England the history of the Italian, Irish and Russian secret societies and revolutionary movements, came to believe that the way to India's freedom was to build up slowly and steadily a band of youngmen, healthy in body and mind, fearless, dedicated and disciplined as soldiers and bound by oath; but he was very much against any premature action or uprising. He believed that the group of youngmen by following his design, would one day enlist more members and form India's army of liberation which would strike when the time was ripe.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Aurobindo's younger brother, believed that national independence could be attained only by an immediate programme of action against the British authority and preaching of revolution.<sup>49</sup> Barindra, while he was an accused in the Alipur Bomb Case, said in his confession on 4th July, 1908, "We are thinking of a far-off revolution and wish to be ready for it..."<sup>50</sup> The paper, *Jugantar*, started on 3rd March, 1906, edited by Barindra Kumar Ghosh and

46. B. B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 104.

47. Quoted in A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 76.

48. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Freedom Struggle and Anusilan Samiti*, Vol. I. (Calcutta, 1979), pp. 19-20.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

50. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Jagoran O Bisphoran*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1973), p. 281.



managed by Bhupendranath Dutta and Abinash Chakravarty, published articles which "exhibit a burning hatred of the British race, breathe revolution in every line and point out how revolution is to be affected..." (according to the observation made by Chief Justice Jenkins in his judgement in the Alipur bomb case).<sup>51</sup> Aurobindo Ghosh also believed that armed revolution was necessary to liberate the motherland from the foreign yoke. "My idea was an armed revolution in the whole of India..." he said (December 18, 1938).<sup>52</sup> Aurobindo asked his countrymen to adopt France as their political exemplar, because she had "blotted out in five terrible years the accumulated oppression of thirteen centuries."<sup>53</sup> In his celebrated book, "*Bhawani Mandir*", written by him in 1905, he presupposed the possibility of a mass armed revolt against the British. Though the scheme did not materialise, it throws considerable light upon the working of Aurobindo's mind, particularly his views that an armed revolt was feasible if necessary organisational steps were carefully taken.<sup>54</sup> "Politics is the ideal of the Kshatriya and the morality of the Kshatriya ought to govern our political actions..."<sup>55</sup> Without Kshatriya strength at its back, Aurobindo asserted, all political struggle would be unavailing. He characterised his attitude as political *vedantism* which considered only what would lead to *moksha* or emancipation.<sup>56</sup> In the *Bande Mataram* he wrote, "It is the virtues of the Kshatriyas that we must develop...the first virtue of the Kshatriya is to protect his weak and suffering countrymen against oppression and welcome death in a just and righteous battle."<sup>57</sup>

Regarding the actual method of action to be followed against the British, there were two schools of thought among the protagonists of violence. One believed in armed struggle against the British with the help of the Indian soldiers, and pinned its faith on the development of international situation which would provide a favourable opportunity

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51. Freedom Paper, non-conf.-entitled, "An Account of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal (1899-1907)", West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  52. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 91.
  53. New Lamps for Old, No.4, in the *Indu Prakash*, September 18, 1893
  54. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 111.
  55. *Bande Mataram : Early Political Writings of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry 1973), p. 125.
  56. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.
  57. *Bande Mataram*, (Daily), April 5, 1907.



and bring necessary help and assistance from abroad. The other school held that sporadic acts of terrorism in the form of murdering British officials would be able to paralyze the machinery of government and thereby bring it to its knees. Both these schools, however, felt the urgent need of building up a revolutionary spirit in the country at large in order to create mass consciousness about the actual situation of the country and to make the people ready to strike at the opportune moment. Military training and collection of arms in secret also formed a common programme of both the schools.<sup>58</sup> It is relevant to point out in this connection that the so-called terrorist activities were neither sudden nor isolated reactions against specific measures of the government, nor undertaken as a remedy against any particular grievance. The overt acts of the revolutionary secret societies were the outward manifestations of a determined and violent resistance to the British Government offered with a view to overthrowing their rule in India. Except in methods of operation, it is very difficult to distinguish the terrorists from the nationalists of the new school.<sup>59</sup>

Two features of this new cult, emphasized by Barindra and his group, viz. the manufacture of bombs and murder of officials in order to paralyze the British system of administration, did not appeal to another group of revolutionaries. As a result, the adoption of this programme of action by Barindra created a split in the revolutionary party. Pramatha Mitra, the President of the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta, was not in favour of starting violent activities immediately. So a new group was formed within the Anushilan Samiti with Aurobindo Ghosh as its President. On the other hand, Jadu Gopal Mukherjee, one of the notable revolutionary leaders, objected to the cult of bomb, as, in his opinion, isolated outrages were not likely to achieve the end. According to him, revolution was a four-pronged effort, the youth, labour, peasant and army being its four essential constituents, and the revolutionaries must work among all these people and bring them to their way of thinking by making them conscious of the critical situation in India under the British.<sup>60</sup> "Independence would not come by

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58. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 266.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

personal murder", Jadugopal used to say.<sup>61</sup> Jatindranath Banerjee (Niralamba Swami of later days), while claiming to be the first person to inspire Aurobindo with his political views, said, "I convinced Aurobindo that it was by force that such a government (i.e. a suitable government) could be obtained".<sup>62</sup> He also declared in public that freedom could not be achieved without military power and armed revolution. Aurobindo, like Tilak, outwardly, laid stress on a bloodless revolution in his public utterances, but the secret activities of both indicated a different policy.<sup>63</sup> By 1906 Aurobindo emerged as the spiritual father of the new cult of triumph through terror in Bengal, and profoundly influenced Bhupendranath Datta and Barindra Kumar Ghosh, who became upholders of this cult.<sup>64</sup> Aurobindo's view was that the use of force and violence may be justified, if and when necessary, in the struggle for national independence. He said, "...under certain circumstances a civil struggle becomes in reality a battle and the morality of war is different from the morality of peace. To shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness... Liberty is the life breath of a nation and when the life is attacked... any and every means of self-preservation becomes right and justifiable... It is the nature of pressure which determines the nature of resistance..."<sup>65</sup>

It may be noted here that the revolutionary secret societies in Bengal did not initially include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of strong governmental repression and its natural reaction.<sup>66</sup>

The mode of action advocated and adopted by the Bengal revolutionaries may be broadly classified under two heads, namely active resistance and passive resistance. Active resistance comprised murder of brutally oppressive government officials, making of bombs for their use in such murders as well as in other violent acts, and committing of dacoities for the purpose of collection of money and arms for revolutionary purpose. An article in the *Jugantar* of March 3rd,

61. Jadugopal Mukhopadhyaya, *Biptabi Jibaner Smriti*, Calcutta, B.E. 1363), p. 299.

62. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, (Calcutta, 1973), p. 138.

63. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

64. Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, *The Origins of National Education Movement*, (Calcutta, 1957), p. 74.

65. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109, f.n. Doctrine of Passive Resistance, pp. 29-31.

66. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 22.



1907, contains in the plainest language an incitement to murder of oppressive English officials. In 1907 the *Sandhya* also was advocating murder and revolution in plainer language than the *Jugantar*.<sup>67</sup> The *Sandhya* of May 6th, 1907, wrote, "It is a matter of great rejoicing that an excellent kind of bomb is being manufactured..." The *Sandhya* of May 14th, 1907, contains an exhortation to store bombs which may kill ten or twenty people. The Revolutionaries acquired in secret books like *Nitra Explosives* by Stanford, the *Swordsman* by Alfred Hutton, *Modern Weapons and Modern War* by J.S. Black etc. and studied them in order to gain knowledge of military action.<sup>68</sup> Among the members of the secret *Samiti* or revolutionary group established in the garden house at Manicktola in Calcutta by Barindra, Ullaskar Dutta and Hemchandra Das were experts in bomb-making. In 1907 Hemchandra Das, on his return to India after finishing his studies on bomb-making in France, utilised his newly acquired knowledge in making bombs for the *Samiti*'s use. In fact he was the leading bomb-maker of the *Samiti*.<sup>69</sup> The first *Jugantar* leaflet contained a detailed recipe for making picric acid bombs.<sup>70</sup> From the statement made by Upendranath Banerjee, we come to know that bombs first came into use, when Ullaskar joined the society about October, 1907.<sup>71</sup> Political action also included collection of arms for the purpose of revolutionary activities. Arms were collected through plunder and dacoity, by placing orders for arms in the names of persons in confidence of the government and also by importation of arms from France and other European countries. In 1907 the number of registered parcels received by the revolutionaries rose to 34, most of them containing revolvers, despatched from St. Etienne, the Government Arms Factory in France.<sup>72</sup> Barindra, in his statement made on 4th May, 1908, stated, "We were collecting weapons in small quantities. Altogether I have collected 11 revolvers, 4 rifles and 1 gun."<sup>73</sup> Sir Bhupati Majumdar, in his oral interview, said, "Some of us were sent

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- 67. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly magazine, (microfilmed), Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, September 20, 1908.
  - 68. K.C. Ghosh, *Roll of Honour*, pp. 149-150.
  - 69. Uma & Haridas Mukhopadhyaya, *Bharate Swadhinata Andolone Jugantar Patrikar Dan*, Calcutta, 1972, p. 33.
  - 70. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 370.
  - 71. Home Political Deposit, August, 1911, No. 9, National Archives, New Delhi.
  - 72. K.C. Ghosh, *Roll of Honour*, p. 150.
  - 73. Freedom Papers, No.100-A, non-conf. State Archives (W. Bengal), Calcutta.



abroad to start smuggling arms. Some Japanese rifles also came into our possession. That was in 1907.”<sup>74</sup>

It is significant to point out in this connection that Aurobindo did not support secret killings and wrote, “They are the rank and noxious fruit of a rank and noxious policy.” Though a guarded pronouncement, here we find an indication of a future revolt.<sup>75</sup> Aurobindo further said that it was neither any vital part nor any intention of his revolution to take part in dacoity or to kill British officers. But he did not oppose such activities perhaps because he felt that whenever any movement was supported by the public opinion and the public wish, it was not proper to obstruct it.<sup>76</sup> Thus Aurobindo lived a double political life; on the one hand, he was an outspoken leader of the Nationalist Party whose creed he effectively advocated through press and platform; on the other, he was the secret leader and inspirer of the violent, underground terrorist movement which aimed at destroying the power of the British Government.<sup>77</sup> At the same time he was aware of the limitations of mere terrorism seeking to achieve the country’s freedom.<sup>78</sup> In the words of the Intelligence Branch Report, “...he (Aravinda) was the head and front of the whole movement...”<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Jadugopal Mukherjee did not believe in terrorism. According to him, revolution must be a prolonged effort to regenerate and revitalise the student community or the youths, and to evoke the sympathy and support of the labourers, farmers and soldiers so that they would actively participate in the movement, and thereby make it a success.<sup>80</sup> Rashbehari Bose and Jatindranath Mukherjee, who represented the second phase of the revolutionary movement in Bengal, (1910-'18 period) stood for a bolder and more comprehensive scheme of political action by securing the support of the Indian army and enlisting the military-cum-financial help of some big powers of the West, particularly those who were opposed to England at that moment. Rashbehari and Jatindranath

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74. Oral Interview with Sri Bhupati Majumdar, New Delhi, January 2nd, 1969, by Dr. (Mrs) Aparna Basu for Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

75. Uma & Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 43.

76. K.C. Ghosh, *Jagoran O Bishphoran*, p. 280.

77. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 114.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

79. Uma & Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 196 f.n.; I.B. Records, W.Bengal, F.N. 1012-17, p. 1.

80. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

perhaps gave a more realistic orientation to Indian politics,<sup>81</sup> and the idea was later translated into action by Subhas Chandra Bose.

According to the Intelligence Branch Records, the police received information in 1915, from a secret agency, which was corroborated by an independent source, that Anukul Chakravarti had done his best to tamper with the 11th Rajput Regiment, then stationed at Dacca.<sup>82</sup> Among the 10th Jat Regiment in Bengal, the propaganda of the revolutionaries created some restlessness and sensation. But this method was not much successful, since it was detected at the very beginning; and as a result of this, one *habildar* and one sepoy were found guilty by court martial and were sentenced to one year's imprisonment.<sup>83</sup> It has already been noted that the secret societies in Bengal did not initially include terrorism in its programme,<sup>84</sup> but the Dacca Anushilan Samiti soon came to have a violence department, as is evident from the Government Records and from the history sheets of revolutionaries like Manindra Kumar Sen, who was a member of this department of the Samiti in Comilla and confessed it in his own statement.<sup>85</sup> In fact, many of the secret revolutionary societies of Bengal served a double purpose; - outwardly, they posed as harmless and highly commendable institutions for training boys in benevolent and philanthropic activities, while secretly they were depots for the collection of arms and gave training to their members in acts of violence.<sup>86</sup> According to the Intelligence Branch, Aurobindo was the "founder of the violence section of the Bengal revolutionary party."<sup>87</sup> An analysis of the murders committed by the Anushilan Samiti revealed a few traits,- disciplinary murder of members who grossly violated the rules of secrecy or had supplied information to the police by becoming approvers or otherwise, murder of spies who were directly responsible for the arrest, persecution and death of the revolutionaries and murder of persons who aided and abetted the Intelligence Branch men in their search for the revolutionaries.<sup>88</sup> Naren Banerji, a member of the

81. Uma Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

82. Home Political A, Conf. April, 1916, F. N. 472-474, National Archives, N. Delhi.

83. K.C. Ghosh, *Jagoran O Bishphoran*, p. 325.

84. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 222.

85. Home Political A, Conf. February, 1917, F. Nos. 172-176, National Archives.

86. Freedom Papers entitled "An Account of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal" Part I & II (1899-1907) Non-Confidential, W. Bengal State Archives.

87. Uma & Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 48.

88. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), Vol. I, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.



Chandernagore Gang, stated in his statement that, "The object of our society is to commit assassination with a view to removing from the field officers who have obtained an insight into our working, to inspire fear amongst other officers so that political repression will come to an end..."<sup>89</sup>

Money was urgently required for maintaining the activities of the revolutionaries. In the beginning subscriptions from friends and patrons sufficed for the purpose. But, with the increase of revolutionary activities, this source proved quite inadequate, and it became necessary to extort money from the rich and the affluent. This was regarded by the revolutionaries as "forced taxes from those who are in a position to pay". Sometimes, they treated such money as "forced loans", to be repaid with interest when Swaraj was established in India. There are cases on record, such as the Netra dacoity, committed in 1909, when the person whose money was looted received an acknowledgement of the debt with a promise to repay it with interest.<sup>90</sup> This was the genesis of the so-called political dacoities committed by the Revolutionaries of Bengal. Satish Chandra Basu, in his statement, observed categorically that neither P. Mitra, the president of the Anushilan Samiti, nor Sister Nivedita approved of political dacoity. In fact, political dacoities were always repugnant to a section of the revolutionaries, for they thought that these might demoralize the revolutionary workers; what was undertaken in public interest might be later influenced by motives of private gain and selfish interest. Besides this, the dacoities were likely to alienate public sympathy from the movement. Jadugopal Mukherjee was opposed to political dacoity for the aforesaid reasons.<sup>91</sup> Makhan Sen of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti was also of the same opinion. He thought that the revolutionaries should avoid overt acts like murder and dacoity that cost them more than they gained by these. These would stand in the way of their winning popularity.<sup>92</sup> Dharendra Ghatak also opposed political dacoities as bad policy, though he had strong

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89. Home Political (Conf.) F.N. 342 (1-5), 1913, W. Bengal State Archives.

90. History Sheet No.687, West Bengal State Archives. (Narendra Nath Bhattacharya).

91. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

92. Oral History, Interview with Sri Bhupendra Kumar Datta, February 11, 1971, Calcutta, by Dr. A.K. Gupta and Dr. Hari Dev Sharma for the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library New Delhi.



revolutionary leanings.<sup>93</sup> The argument of these who supported dacoity was the need of funds to carry on essential revolutionary work such as purchasing arms, maintaining the organisations and carrying on propaganda work both at home and abroad. Any way, political dacoities formed an important feature of the revolutionary movement in Bengal,<sup>94</sup> and the majority of the revolutionaries supported them.

Books such as *Mukti Kon Pathe* (containing select articles from the *Jugantar*) were published by the Bengal revolutionaries in support of political dacoity. The book pointed out that as revolutionary work advanced, money must be exacted from the society by means of force, and that since political dacoity aimed at the good of the society, extortion of money from the miserly or extravagant members of the society for revolutionary work by the application of force was perfectly just. This book supported political dacoities on the ground of expediency.<sup>95</sup> The *Jugantar* of March 3, 1907, justified the policy of committing dacoities for the purpose of raising funds for the revolution, when subscriptions failed.<sup>96</sup>

According to Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, the idea of collecting money by means of political dacoity was present in the revolutionary secret societies from the very beginning. The reason for committing such dacoities was the unwillingness of rich people to contribute money for achieving the country's freedom. But when political dacoity was started in the swadeshi era, it was found that such dacoity was committed generally on the Indians, because it was not so easy to commit dacoity on the English officials and merchants living in India or to raid the government treasury.<sup>97</sup>

According to the government report, "The principle of raising money by dacoity has all along had many hot opponents in persons otherwise in full sympathy with political outrage... it had more advocates than opponents in the revolutionary party". Dacoity was also encouraged to give an opportunity to the revolutionaries to prove their

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93. Home Political A, September, 1918, No. 185-189 (K.W.) National Archives.

94. R.C. Majumdar, *op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 266-267.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

96. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Magazine, 20th September, 1908.

97. Bhupendra Nath Datta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram* (Calcutta, 1983), p. 19.

courage and intelligence. The idea of plundering the government's money came from Bankim Chandra's *Ananda Math* (1882) and it was later popularised by the *Jugantar*. This policy was applied also to foreign merchant companies and pro-government rich persons. It is, however, undeniable that many dacoities undertaken for political purposes led to immoral practices. In East Bengal the number of dacoities committed was greater than that in the West.<sup>98</sup>

As regards the war-strategy, Bhupendranath Dutta relates in his book, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram* that they were taught to adopt the guerilla tactics.<sup>99</sup> Among the things found by the police in the Muraripukur Garden House in Calcutta, were 394 copies of *Bartaman Rananiti*, a book in Bengali on the modern art of war, containing a reference to guerilla methods of warfare. This book was written by Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, one of the important members of the Manicktola Garden Samiti.<sup>100</sup> The Dacca Anushilan Samiti also wanted to follow the same tactics. For this purpose, training was given by arranging fake warfare among the members under the leadership of Pulin Behari Das.<sup>101</sup>

Both the extremists and the militant nationalists preached the idea of offering passive resistance to the British Government by means of boycott and swadeshi. B.C. Pal declared, "Our method is passive resistance which means an organised determination to refuse to render any voluntary and honorary service to the government." This method was meant to foster an absolute mental aloofness from the foreign government by the creation in the public mind of a strong sense of aversion to all official connection and self-sufficiency in every aspect of life.<sup>102</sup> Though his doctrine of passive resistance advocated a spirit of non-cooperation with the government for the attainment of the legitimate political rights, it was nevertheless peaceful and non-violent in character, and was to operate within the bounds of law. Thus his brand of passive resistance avoided direct clash with the government. Through passive resistance, Pal sought to organise the moral and

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98. K.C. Ghosh, *Jagoran O Bishphoran*, Vol. II, pp. 282-283.

99. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

100. Freedom paper No. 100 A, Alipore Bomb Case, W. Bengal State Archives.

101. Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 285.

102. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.



spiritual forces of the people in order to bring the pressure of the popular will to bear upon the administration of the country and thereby to gradually work out a popular constitution within the government.<sup>103</sup> Aurobindo, on the other hand, enunciated the principle "No cooperation without control." (Open letter to my countrymen published in the *Karmayogin*).<sup>104</sup> In January, 1910, Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin* that Bepin Chandra Pal was the prophet and first preacher of passive resistance; but later on, he contradicted his earlier statement, in course of a letter written on December 5th, 1944, to Charuchandra Dutta, a retired member of the I.C.S., and asserted that he himself was the writer of the series of articles on passive resistance, published in April, 1907, and that Bepin Chandra Pal had nothing to do with it since he had ceased connection with the paper towards the end of 1906.<sup>105</sup>

Aurobindo also wrote a series of articles entitled, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance" which first appeared in the daily *Bande Mataram*, under the general title of "New Thought", from April 11 to April 23, 1907.<sup>106</sup> He wrote, "Passive resistance is the only effective means, except actual armed revolt, by which the organised strength of the nation, guided by the principle of self-development and self-help, can wrest the control of our national life from the grip of an alien bureaucracy and thus developing into a free popular government, naturally replacing the bureaucracy it extrudes until the process culminates in a self-governed India, liberated from foreign control."<sup>107</sup> "The first principle of passive resistance which the new school has placed in the forefront of their programme, is to make administration under present conditions impossible by an organised refusal to do anything which shall help either the British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it unless and until the conditions are changed in the manner and to the extent demanded by the people. This attitude is summed up in one word "boycott."<sup>108</sup>

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103. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

104. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 127.

105. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

106. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram : Early Political writings*, (Pondicherry, 1973), p. 83.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 101.



To Aurobindo, passive resistance was a means, not an end.<sup>109</sup> Aurobindo preached the idea of a five-pronged boycott i.e., political, economic, judicial, educational and social.<sup>110</sup> At the same time he made concrete suggestions about the positive steps that must accompany such different aspects of boycott in order to make it effective. In his writings, Aurobindo often called it defensive resistance. Along with political boycott which meant dissociation from the foreign government, he expounded the importance of building up a national organisation. Judicial boycott meant boycott of the British system of judicial administration, refusal to resort to the alien courts of justice and to seek justice by forming national arbitration courts. Educational boycott meant boycott of educational institutions controlled or aided by the British Government and introducing a national system of education by establishing national schools and colleges.<sup>111</sup> Economic boycott meant refusal to help the process of exploitation and impoverishment of the country by boycotting British goods and restraining others from purchasing them and also the use of indigenous or home-made goods. In Aurobindo's political technique the concepts of boycott and Swadeshi were closely connected.<sup>112</sup> The first condition of a successful boycott was therefore the organisation of national industry, extension of that which already existed and the opening of new lines of enterprise.<sup>113</sup> Social boycott was the last canon of passive resistance.<sup>114</sup> Aurobindo wrote, "The social boycott is a weapon absolutely necessary for the enforcement of the popular will in this matter...it consists merely in a passive abstinence - 'sending him to conventry' in the English phrase."<sup>115</sup> The idea was to shun a person socially, in parties, festivals, weddings and so on and to make him feel the scorn and contempt of his fellow countrymen due to his anti-national activities. A great advantage of social boycott was that it did not involve any direct clash with the law or resort to violence.<sup>116</sup> What Aurobindo emphasized was that boycott

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109. Kishore Gandhi (ed.), *Contemporary Revelance of Aurobindo* (Delhi, 1973), p. 77.  
 110. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 141-142.  
 111. Sri Aurobindo, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 102-103, Kishore Gandhi (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.  
 112. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 125.  
 113. *Karmayogin*, January 8th, 1910 (microfilmed).  
 114. Sri Aurobindo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 111.  
 115. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 137 f.n. : *Karmayogin*, August 14, 1909.  
 116. *Ibid.*, p. 138, f.n. *Karmayogin*, September 4, 1909.

of foreign goods and boycott of these persons who used foreign goods must be accepted by all. Without the boycott of persons, boycott of things could not be effective. Any person purchasing foreign salt or sugar or cloth, which were specified by the Bengal revolutionaries to be religiously avoided, automatically became guilty of treason to the nation.<sup>117</sup> However, in practice, judicial boycott was not successful and Aurobindo himself admitted this in 1909 when he said, "The movement of arbitration...has been dropped as a result of repression."<sup>118</sup>

Aurobindo further stated that the passive resister must take up his creed with the certainty of having to suffer for it.<sup>119</sup> Passive resisters, both as individuals and in the mass, must always be prepared to break an unjust, coercive law or order, and face the legal consequences.<sup>120</sup> But there was a limit to passive resistance. The passive resister would maintain his attitude of passivity so long as the executive's action was peaceful and within the rules of the fight. The moment the executive used violent or illegal methods of coercion, passive resistance would cease and active resistance would become a duty which, though no longer passive, would still be defensive resistance.<sup>121</sup> Therefore the use of violence in the furtherance of boycott was purely a matter of policy and expediency.<sup>122</sup> Here we find a difference in the ideas of passive resistance of B.C. Pal and Aurobindo.

Active resistance meant the use of violence and force in order to cause positive harm to the Government while passive resistance meant to abstain from rendering any help to the Government. Thus the object in both the cases were the same, though their methods were different.<sup>123</sup> Thus Aurobindo anticipated Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation, passive resistance and Swadeshi by well over a decade. In his 'Open letter to my countrymen' published in the *Karmayogin* (31st July, 1909) Aurobindo publicly declared, "no control, no-cooperation should be the watchword of our lawful agitation." The use of the term

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117. Sri Aurobindo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 112.

118. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 130-131.

119. Sri Aurobindo, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 109.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 114-115.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

123. K. Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.



'no-cooperation' is significant in the light of the Non-cooperation movement, launched by Gandhiji ten years later.<sup>124</sup>

Though the idea of forming secret societies was in the air for a long time,<sup>125</sup> the Bengal revolutionaries combined physical training with secret revolutionary activities because this enabled them to attract the youth without immediately rousing the suspicion of the police. They set up *akhra*s or centres of physical culture in Calcutta as well as remote villages of Bengal. Physical training and drill were taught to the young-men and boys who became their members. Wrestling and lathi-play were also taught, and practice with the lathi which was formerly the weapon of the lower classes only now became fashionable among the young, educated well-to-do or *bhadralok* class in Bengal. Sarala Devi, a niece of Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore, started an academy at Ballygunge, in Calcutta where Bengali youths were instructed in fencing and Jiu-Jitsu by a professional swordsman from Goa named Murtaza. The object behind this was political - to form a trained body able to resist force with force and to do propaganda work.<sup>126</sup> The modus operandi of the Bengal Revolutionaries was, therefore, to set up societies of youngmen ostensibly for physical, cultural and intellectual activities, but really for training them in the technique of revolutionary action.<sup>127</sup> The literature of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti shows that the main aim of the Samiti was armed revolution and not individual terrorism. Salkeld, the then District Magistrate of Dacca, hinted in 1909 that the Anushilan Samiti aimed at overthrowing the British rule through armed revolution, as it was the only feasible means available, and that all murder and dacoities, committed by the members of the Samiti, were prompted by the necessity of preserving the organisation. It was never a purely terrorist organisation, draining out its energy in an orgy of violence.<sup>128</sup>

The revolutionary activities referred to above had, of necessity, to be a secret underground affair. Any person who wanted to engage in

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124. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 178-179.

125. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

126. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

127. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 221.

128. Home Dept. Political Record, A. Conf. February, 1908, F. No. 70-71, H.L. Salkeld's Report on Anusilan Samiti (National Archives, New Delhi).



these activities had first to take an oath of secrecy. Sri Aurobindo gave the oath of his revolutionary party to P. Mitter. He also administered the oath to Hemchandra Das with a sword and the Gita in his hands. The person taking the oath had to promise in a solemn manner that he would try to secure the freedom of Mother India at any cost, and not to declare the secret of his society to any one outside.<sup>129</sup> This oath or *mantra* of initiation was brought from Maharashtra. According to Bhupendranath Dutta, at the time of initiation the members were told about the establishment of *Dharmarajya* (Kingdom of Religion). Here the influence of Maharashtra is clearly visible, as it was the ideal of Ramdas.<sup>130</sup> The Anushilan Samiti laid down three types of vows--preliminary, final and special, in order to infuse revolutionary morality into the new members so that they could bravely face any danger and maintain absolute secrecy. The final vow, particularly, contained six pledges in which the members promised to keep secret the affairs of the Samiti from persons who were not bound by oath.<sup>131</sup> But there were some revolutionaries who did not support this idea of taking oath. Sri Bhupendra Kumar Dutta (Of Faridpur), a revolutionary stated in an oral interview that he strongly opposed this idea as he was of opinion that discipline and loyalty depended on culture and faith and that an oath could not always prevent betrayal by men taking it.<sup>132</sup> It is significant to note in this connection, that the pledge or the oath enjoined the penalty of death for betrayal of the cause of revolution and also for confession of the secrets of the movement.<sup>133</sup> Narendra Nath Gossain who became an approver in the Alipur Bomb Case was murdered in jail for his betrayal, on 31st August, 1908.<sup>134</sup> In 1917, Rebati Nag, a member of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, was assassinated by his associates for disciplinary reasons.<sup>135</sup> The Samiti also used to appoint some of its members as spies for the purpose of investigation. Indu

129. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

130. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 44-45.

131. Home Dept. Political (Confidential) Deposit, August, 1909, No. 21, Report by Mr. H.L. Salkeld regarding the Anusilan Samiti, National Archives, New Delhi.

132. Oral History, Interview with Sri Bhupendra Kumar Datta, *Op. Cit.*

133. Oral History Interview with Sri Surendra Mohan Ghose, New Delhi, 27th February, 1968 by Sri K.P. Rungachary & Dr. Hari Dev Sharma for Nehru Memorial Library.

134. Sankar Ghose (ed.), *First Rebels*, (Calcutta, 1981), p. 40.

135. Home Political A, June 1918, No. 381-385, history sheet of Chandra Kumar Ghosh, National Archives, New Delhi.

Bhusan Chakravarti, in his statement, confessed that Brahma alias Sishir Ghosh was appointed by the Anushilan Samiti to spy on the Criminal Investigation Department officers and also the movements of the members of the Samiti.<sup>136</sup> Aswini Kumar Ganguly, a Bengal revolutionary, in an oral interview, stated that secrecy was maintained in every possible way and that code language and signs were used for carrying out the instructions of the leaders.<sup>137</sup> For example, the word 'Sweets' was used to signify bombs, as evident from a letter written by Barindra Ghosh to his brother Aurobindo.<sup>138</sup> A study of the history sheets and statements of the Bengal revolutionaries of this period (1902 - 1919) also shows that they used different pseudonyms instead of their original names in order to maintain secrecy. The Bengal revolutionaries often maintained secrecy even at the cost of their lives. Profulla Chaki, one of the earliest Bengali martyrs, committed suicide by shooting himself, so that the British Government could not compel him to confess the secrets of his party.<sup>139</sup> Needless to say, these secret underground activities of revolutionary societies were not approved of by leaders like B.C. Pal.<sup>140</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries also wanted to enlist the sympathy and support of the common people for their activities. B.C. Pal, wanted the new movement to represent the forces of real democracy and the forces of labour. He wrote, "we must have workers and labourers in the country's cause..."<sup>141</sup> Aurobindo also recognised at least in theory, the absolute necessity of generating mass enthusiasm and bringing about mass participation in the national cause. As early as 1893 he expressed this view and criticised the Congress for remaining a narrow organisation without any mass support.<sup>142</sup> Though Aurobindo guided the underground terrorised movement in order to demoralise the British Government in India, he did not have any illusions as to the possibility

136. Home Political A, May, 1917, Nos. 153-160, K.W., National Archives (New Delhi.).

137. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly in Calcutta on 19.4.1983 at his residence.

138. Sankar Ghose (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

139. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.* p. 116.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

141. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 62 f. n. : B.C. Pal, "The Cry of Leadership", *Bande Mataram*, October 1, 1906.

142. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 172.



of mere terrorism securing the country's freedom. In his writings he made it clear that he wished the national movement to be a broad-based mass agitation which would organise the vast Indian masses in an irresistible upsurge towards emancipation.<sup>143</sup> He wrote, "...with that distressed, ignorant proletariat ...resides our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future...I again assert, as our first and holiest duty, the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat."<sup>144</sup> Jadugopal Mukherjee also preached the idea of a mass revolt or a four-fold revolution in which the students, labourers, farmers and soldiers would participate. According to him, no revolution could be successful unless and until all these four categories of people took an active part in it.<sup>145</sup> He laid great emphasis on mass support and mass participation in the revolutionary movement.<sup>146</sup>

In order to create a broad base for their movement, the Bengal revolutionaries decided to organise the Shivaji festival. This festival had originated in Maharashtra in 1895 under the inspiration of Tilak, and it was first celebrated in Calcutta in 1902. Subsequently the festival was also held in mofussil towns like Barisal every year. The programme of the festival included an exhibition of Swadeshi goods in order to give a boost to indigenous industries, and it was usually attended by all-India leaders like Tilak, Khaparde, Lajpat Rai and Munje. The motive behind the celebration of this festival was to awaken a feeling of respect for the noble life of Shivaji and to inculcate the spirit of self-sacrifice and selfless dedication to the national cause, by setting forth before the people the brilliant career and the great achievements of the Maratha leader. The main object of the festival was to prepare the ground for the union of the Bengalees with the people of Maharashtra.<sup>147</sup>

Almost from the beginning the Bengal revolutionaries realised the necessity of seeking foreign help and assistance and winning foreign sympathy and support for their cause. They began to think about organising and establishing revolutionary secret societies in foreign countries. Such thought also appeared in the minds of many students of

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143. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

144. "New Lamps For Old", No. 7, *Indu Prakash*, Dec. 4, 1893, in *Bande Mataram: Early Political writings of Sri Aurobindo*.

145. Jadugopal Mukhopadhyaya, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

147. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 148.



Bengal who went abroad for higher studies before 1911. They were looking for an opportunity to give shape to this idea, and ultimately the outbreak of World War I provided them with the opportunity to seek German help.<sup>148</sup>

As regards the form of government to be established after the attainment of independence, the Bengal revolutionaries had no clear-cut ideas, different leaders holding different views on this subject. As early as 1907 Bepin Pal observed that the future government of India would be a United States of India consisting of the different nationalities of India, and that this federal Indian State would be secular. B.C. Pal's view was that independent India should have a democratic form of government, based on universal adult franchise.<sup>149</sup> In a letter written to Baptista, dated, January 5, 1920, Pondicherry, Aurobindo hinted at the form of government which was the most suitable for India in the post-independence period. He said that he believed in something which might be called social democracy, not of the European kind but of a different kind which India must strike out, following her own original path. In this respect India would follow her own lines, but Aurobindo did not clearly explain what these lines would be, though he said that he had formed his own ideas regarding them. He was rather secretive and evasive on this question.<sup>150</sup> Indu Bhusan Roy who was convicted in the Alipur Bomb Case stated in his confession to the Magistrate, that the object of the Manicktala garden society, was to make India free from the foreign yoke and to establish a better government.<sup>151</sup> However in this statement, the term 'better government' does not clearly explain the exact type of government which would be set up in independent India after its liberation from the British yoke. Aswini Kumar Ganguly stated that the future form of the country's government was a matter to be decided by her people in due course.<sup>152</sup> Ganesh Ghosh, another revolutionary, said in an interview, that he and his group wanted to have an independent democratic government in the country.<sup>153</sup> On the other

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148. K.C. Ghosh, *Jagoran O Bhishphoran*, p. 382.

149. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 130-134.

150. B.G. Tilak, (microfilmed) Reel 3, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.

151. Freedom Papers, No. 100 A, Alipur Bomb Case, West Bengal State Archives.

152. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly at his residence in Calcutta on 19.4.1983.

153. Oral Interview taken of Sri Ganesh Ghosh at his residence in Calcutta on 4.11.1982.

hand, Sunil Das, another revolutionary who joined the movement in 1925 remarked that their later political object was to bring about a social change or social revolution and a new social order, based on the cultural heritage of India.<sup>154</sup> It should be noted, however, that both Ghosh and Das joined the movement in the post-World War (I) period.

With the advent of Gandhi launching the non-violent non-co-operation movement, the revolutionaries became divided into two distinct camps. One group supported Gandhi's plan and programme of work, and joined the Congress and the non-co-operation movement in order to establish a direct and closer contact with the masses; while the other group of revolutionaries did not support Gandhi's idea of ahimsa or non-violence, and held that the programme of the non-co-operation movement might demoralise the people and that excess of non-violence might even make them weak and submissive. A large number of members of the Anushilan Samiti stuck to this view.<sup>155</sup> B.C. Pal did not subscribe to Gandhi's idea of paralysing the government and urged on a scheme of qualified non-co-operation. In fact, he was the first Indian leader of importance to point out some of the negative features of Gandhi's political ideology.<sup>156</sup> Jibantara Haldar, an important member of the Anushilan Samiti, stated in an oral interview that all along his group had believed that non-violence would not be of much help in achieving independence, and that hence they did not lend much support to Gandhi's movement.<sup>157</sup> Aswini Kumar Ganguly, another member of the Anushilan Samiti; however, said in an oral interview, that he joined the non-co-operation movement after the First World War, as there was disorganisation in their party and because Gandhi's movement gave ample scope for going to the villages and thereby contacting the masses and enlisting their support and sympathy for the freedom struggle. In this connection he related that the Revolutionaries were, for the first time, given a social status, because from the beginning of Gandhi's movement, the peasantry and the working class began to treat

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154. Oral Interview taken of Sri Sunil Das at his residence in Calcutta on 2.2.1984.

155. Oral History Interview with Sri Surindra Mohan Ghose, New Delhi, 27th February, 1968 for Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

156. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 114-116.

157. Oral Interview taken of Sri Jibantara Haldar at his residence in Calcutta on 27.7.83.



them with respect.<sup>158</sup> Among the later Bengal revolutionaries, Ganesh Ghosh stated that many, among his co-workers, supported the non-co-operation movement and joined it as volunteers of the Congress party.<sup>159</sup> It is interesting to note that there were also some revolutionaries who did not fall in either of these two categories but who later on developed a completely new political ideology; for example M.N. Roy, originally a militant nationalist, later on turned into a Marxist-Socialist after studying books on Marxism, during his stay in America at the time of the outbreak of World War I. He was engaged in active politics as a Marxist in Mexico, Russia, China and India, and it was he who fostered the first link between the Communist International and the growth of communism in India at a time when the communist ideology was in its embryo during the 20's of this century.<sup>160</sup> The example of M.N. Roy was followed by many revolutionaries in India during the twenties and thirties of this century.

It is well known that early in 1910 Aurobindo went to live in Pondicherry after his acquittal in the Alipore Bomb Case. It has been suggested by some that Aurobindo's sudden and dramatic withdrawal from active politics was due to his frustration at seeing the militant nationalist movement completely shattered during his year in detention. But this view can hardly be accepted as true in the light of the speeches delivered by him after his release from jail, his various letters, writings and also the publication of the *Karmayogin*, a new journal in 1909.<sup>161</sup> Particularly, the twenty-six letters, which Aurobindo wrote to his disciple, Motilal Roy of Chandernagore, between 1912 and 1921 clearly show that Sri Aurobindo retained his interest in the political and revolutionary activities of his followers at least upto 1915 and that as late as September, 1920, he was thinking of returning to Bengal, where it was his intention to launch the final and decisive battle of his life (a spiritual battle).<sup>162</sup> A letter written to one Anandrao, (not identified)

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158. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly at his residence in Calcutta on 17.4.1983.

159. Oral Interview taken of Sri Ganesh Ghosh at his residence at Calcutta on 4.11.1982.

160. B.S. Sharma, *Political Philosophy of M.N. Roy*, (Delhi, 1965), pp. 2, 11, 12.

161. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 164-165.

162. *Light to Superlight* (unpublished letters of Sri Aurobindo) (Calcutta, 1972), p. 178.



probably in 1912, perhaps indicates that Aurobindo turned to *Yoga* only to acquire some extraordinary powers which would help him in achieving the independence of India.<sup>163</sup> According to the testimony of Motilal Roy, Aurobindo purchased six revolvers at Pondicherry for the use of the Bengal revolutionaries, which was later brought to Bengal by Sachindra Nath Sanyal of Benaras. Most probably 'Tantric books' in Aurobindo's letters stand for revolvers.<sup>164</sup> Motilal Roy further stated that Aurobindo regarded the revolutionary movement itself as 'Veera-chara Tantra' or 'Shaktisadhana' in Indian politics whose only aim was to achieve *mukti* and *bhakti* i.e. liberation and happiness for the whole nation.<sup>165</sup> While in Pondicherry, he even advised his political followers in Bengal to abstain from pamphleteering.<sup>166</sup> In a letter written on 29.8.1914 Aurobindo advised his followers not to show an unconditional or abject loyalty to the British Government even during the World War I. He held that independence should be our goal, though immediately it could not be achieved; and that the Indians should defend the British rule against the Germans and their allies for that would mean defending our own future independence. But he warned the Indian political leaders not to cooperate with the government except in return for a substantial measure of self-government. In another letter of Aurobindo we find that with the failure of the revolutionary movement in India in 1915, Aurobindo completely severed his connection with revolutionary politics.<sup>167</sup> But, that he did not completely lose his interest in Indian politics even in 1922 is evident from a letter written by him to C.R. Das on 18.11.1922.<sup>168</sup> With the passage of time, Aurobindo felt intuitively that India's independence would be achieved without armed insurrection, and that the British would be forced by the pressure of Indian resistance and international events to concede independence to India. The spiritual nationalism which was the keynote of Aurobindo's political philosophy ultimately led him to seek reconciliation in spiritual development, not only for India but for all mankind,<sup>169</sup> for an important factor in his thought was

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163. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

164. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

166. *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.

167. *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

168. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

169. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 165.

the conviction that India must be free not for herself alone but for the benefit of the entire mankind.<sup>170</sup>

On the other hand, in B.C. Pal's political ideas we find a certain amount of dichotomy. While Pal was a persistent believer in free India,<sup>171</sup> on principle, he had no objection to colonial self-government if some of its defects were blotted out.<sup>172</sup> Though a revolutionary, he was against the use of violence of any kind for the purpose of gaining independence.<sup>173</sup> After his release from the Buxar jail, Pal even called himself to be a sociologist and not an extremist, in reply to a question asked by representative of the Statesman. (The Statesman, March 11, 1908).<sup>174</sup> His political ideology was rather tinged with an air of unreality, for he sought to reconcile the ideal of Indian nationalism with his faith in British civility and British democratic spirit which, from the point of view of practical politics, appeared to be quite impossible.<sup>175</sup>

In conclusion, it may be said that as a result of the development of these aforesaid revolutionary political ideas among the Bengal revolutionaries, the national resistance to the British Government took a more definite and realistic shape. By 1915 the revolutionaries became convinced that a popular or mass uprising was a more sound and practical means to liberate India than recourse to sporadic violence and individual terrorism. In spite of certain unavoidable limitations, the political philosophy of the Bengal revolutionaries, as well as the revolutionary methods used by them to translate their thoughts into action, helped the growth of political ideas among the later Indian nationalists, who dominated the Indian political field after 1918. It may be said therefore that the Bengal revolutionaries rendered yeoman's service to the country's cause by preparing the ground for the later national uprising in India.

A thorough analysis of the political ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries reveals the fact that there was much originality, reality and truth in their ideas, though in forming such ideas they were, to a large

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170. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

171. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 69.

172. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

173. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

174. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

175. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79, 83.

extent, influenced by the French Revolution, the Italian Risorgimento under Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi, the Sinn Fein Movement in Ireland, the Nihilist movement in Russia and the American War of Independence. But so far as India was concerned, most of their political ideas were in advance of their age and therefore hardly appreciated or even fully understood by their contemporaries.



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3

**RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE  
BENGAL REVOLUTIONARIES**

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The Bengal revolutionaries, in their struggle for freedom against the British rule, preached a new philosophy of nationalism which elevated patriotism into a sort of religion and transformed religion into patriotism by conceiving the Motherland not only as the Mother but also as the Supreme Deity whose service was considered as the only way to salvation. They also publicly expressed their deep faith in God and propagated the idea that God was the supreme leader behind the nationalist movement.<sup>1</sup> Their religious ideas were tinged with a spiritual fervour and thereby their idea of nationalism tended to verge towards a sort of spiritual nationalism.

The militant nationalists of Bengal derived their inspiration, courage and self-determination to fight against the British from the fiery speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda, based on the philosophical teachings of the Vedanta and the *Gita*, and also the religious devotion to motherland preached by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his famous novel, *Ananda Math*.<sup>2</sup> The youth of Bengal readily responded to Swamiji's clarion call to shake off the national torpor and to bring about a spiritual regeneration. Thus politics became inextricably mixed up with religion.<sup>3</sup>

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1. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 140.
  2. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
  3. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (Calcutta, 1957), pp. 210-211.

The purpose behind the preaching of religious ideas by the Bengal Revolutionaries was two-fold. One purpose was to popularise their political ideas throughout India and to win the sympathy and support of the masses through religion, because they realized that the surest and safest ground to proceed on would be religion. Besides, preaching of political doctrines in a religious garb would make these ideas readily acceptable by the people of the country. Their religious attitude enabled them to visualize God in the nation amidst their countrymen, and thus mentally and physically prepared them to achieve the most difficult job i.e. to dedicate themselves totally to the attainment of the national cause at the cost of everything, including their own lives. In other words, they were ready to sacrifice everything at the altar of the motherland.<sup>4</sup> The other purpose of the Bengal revolutionaries was to revive the importance of the traditional Hindu religion and Hindu philosophy, and to revitalise their countrymen with the ancient religious values in order to oppose the threat to Hindu religion posed by the inflow of new norms and new values, preached by Christianity and Utilitarianism as well as by Brahmoism which was influenced by both and was vehemently opposed to orthodox Hinduism.<sup>5</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries preached the ideal of *nishkama karma* (i.e. everyone must do his duty without caring for the result) as taught in the *Gita*.<sup>6</sup> The *Gita* was given a new orientation by the revolutionaries. It came to be regarded as a "scripture of the *Karmayoga*, a light leading us on to the path of action, a gospel of work." Because of its constant exhortation for *karma* or action, it was deemed suitable for breaking the stupor that had overtaken India. The *Gita* exhorted the fighter to get into action for the protection of the weak and the oppressed and the maintenance of right and justice in the world. To shrink from such a duty was a sign of sheer weakness.<sup>7</sup> The passage in the *Gita* which appealed most to the revolutionaries was that which related how the supporters of the Pandavas with Arjuna at their head, was drawn up in battle against their cousins, the Kauravas.<sup>8</sup> Sri Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna to be a mere instrument in killing the

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4. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 165.

5. Amal Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, (Calcutta, 1967), p. 1.

6. A.C. Guha, *The First spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 94.

7. Kali Charan Ghosh, *The Roll of Honour*, (Calcutta, 1965), p. 127.

8. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, (Calcutta, 1978), p. 45.



enemies as they had been in reality killed already by himself seemed to absolve the revolutionaries of the responsibility for murder. The recurrent cry of Sri Krishna to Arjuna was "Fight and overthrow thy opponents... Give up the result of all thy work to me and with a heart full of spirituality and free from craving, free from all selfish desires, fight." Nothing could be more reassuring to the Bengal revolutionaries than the teaching of the *Gita* : "Whosoever has his temperament purged from egotism, whosoever suffers not his soul to receive the impress of the deed, thought he slays the whole world, yet he slays not and is not bound by his action." The leaders of the revolutionary movement in Bengal tried to instil this lesson into the hearts of their followers.<sup>9</sup>

Another teaching of the *Gita* which greatly inspired the revolutionaries and which they sought to preach among their co-workers was, "killed, you will obtain heaven; victorious, you will enjoy the earth." (*Gita*, 2,37). Through the above quoted passage of the *Gita*, the revolutionaries propagated the idea of self-sacrifice which was the surest way to spiritual enlightenment or attainment of heaven.<sup>10</sup> The revolutionaries made considerable use of the teaching of the *Gita* (2, 31-32) that it was a part of the duty of the Kshatriya to slay his enemy, and that there was no sin in such slaying. The revolutionaries very cleverly preached this ideal of *Gita* in support of political murders.

Bepin Chandra Pal, in his book entitled, *The Soul of India* depicted Sri Krishna as the soul of India, since Krishna represented the ultimate reality and the perfect personality of the Absolute.<sup>11</sup> He further stated that the soul of man was not material but a spiritual substance.<sup>12</sup> Therefore to the truly pious Vaishnava, his body was not his own but that of his Lord, Sri Krishna. So the service of his body was really the service of Krishna himself.<sup>13</sup> Our bodies and our senses were the instruments and vehicles of His *leela* or sport.<sup>14</sup> The positive side of the Vaishnava cult meant the absolute dedication of the body and the senses to the service of Krishna.<sup>15</sup> Here we find that Pal had a profound

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9. Biman Behari Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, (Calcutta, 1966), p. 63.
  10. Home Political Deposit, August, 1909, No. 21, H.L. Salkeld's Report on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, National Archives, New Delhi.
  11. Bepin Chandra Pal, *The Soul of India*, (Calcutta, 1940), p. 36.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 255-256.



regard for Vaishnavism, and sought to preach the Vaishnava philosophy comprising the ideal of the immortality of the soul (the body of a man being a mere instrument of God) and that of complete dedication to the service of God.

During the hearing of the Alipur Bomb Case, an unpublished essay on "The Morality of Boycott", written by Aurobindo Ghosh, was produced on behalf of the prosecution. In this essay he wrote, "The *Gita* is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin and from aggression as a lowering of morality." In this document Aurobindo very tactfully preached the idea of the use of physical force with the support of the teachings of the *Gita*, for the purpose of achieving the country's freedom.<sup>16</sup> In an article entitled, "Sri Krishna or Indian Nationalism", Aurobindo further compared the life of Sri Krishna with the Indian national movement. For all great movements there were four seasons of life development. The first season was a secret or quasi-secret growth when the world was oblivious of its momentous birth similar to Krishna's growing from infancy to youth in Gokul among the obscure and the despised. The second period was the emergence of struggle into light just as the sudden coming of Krishna from Gokul to Mathura. In the third period the saviour came face to face with the tyrant. Last of all was the season of rest and fulfilment similar to the life of Krishna at Dwaraka. The idea of Indian nationalism was in the second season of its life history. But nationalism was not simply born of oppression. Like Krishna, nationalism was an *Avatar* (incarnation of God) and could not be slain. Nationalism was a divinely appointed *Shakti* (power) of the Eternal and must do its God-given work before its return to the bosom of universal energy from which it came.<sup>17</sup> In another article Aurobindo discussed about the immortality of the soul of a man and said that heaven awaited the patriot who died for his country.<sup>18</sup>

Jibantara Halдар, an ex-revolutionary, stated in an oral interview, "We imbibed the ideal of selfless devotion and service to humanity from the *Gita*." He and his compatriots were also inspired by the spiritual teaching of the *Gita* regarding the immortality of the soul. It was the

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16. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

17. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly, microfilmed, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi, August 23rd, 1908.

18. *Ibid.*, 1st March, 1908.

soul and not the mortal body of a person which was important, and the soul never died but merely changed its habitat from one mortal body to another, because it was indestructible.<sup>19</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries also preached the ideal of '*nimitta matra*', as taught in the *Gita*, meaning that men were only instruments in the hands of God who really pre-ordained the things that would take place.<sup>20</sup>

In the Anushilan Samiti in Calcutta, the study of the *Gita*, the *Karma Yoga* of Vivekananda and his other writings was made compulsory.<sup>21</sup> Regular classes were held in the Anushilan Samiti every Sunday for explaining the teachings of the *Gita* to its members. Swami Saradananda, the first General Secretary of the Ramkrishna Mission, himself used to take the *Gita* Class.<sup>22</sup>

According to H.L. Salkeld's Report on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, 17 copies of the *Gita* were found in the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, and ten copies were entered in the Anushilan library catalogue. It was clear from the library issue of books that during a period of three months the *Gita* was issued eight times. This showed that the *Gita* was in great demand among the members of the Samiti, particularly senior members like Ashutosh Dasgupta, Akshay Kumar Datta and Pramod Behari Das (Pulin's brother). There is further evidence of the special honour accorded to the *Gita* by the members of this Samiti. The verandah on the east end of the first floor of the Samiti was designated by a special name, the "*Gita* Class" (Exhibit No.1102). The room to the immediate West of this verandah was the private room of Pulin Behari Das, from which alone access could be gained to the *Gita* Class. Entry to this class was confined to a select few, and it depended on the special permission of Pulin Babu, as is evident from the statement (dated 5th November, 1908) of a member, Ananta Mohan Chatterjee. This statement implies the existence of an inner circle of the Samiti, and it may be safely presumed that Pulin Das himself was the teacher of the *Gita* Class and that he carefully selected his pupils. The teachings of the *Gita*,

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19. Oral Interview taken of Sri Jibantara Haldar, at his residence in Calcutta on 28.7.83.
  20. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 94.
  21. Jibantara Haldar, *Anushilan Samitir Itihas*, (Calcutta, 1950), p. 11.
  22. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 63.



taken literally, were an excellent training for those who were embarking on a desperate enterprise in which their lives might, at any moment, be forfeited. In this Samiti, the *Gita* was studied by both boys and youngmen. The writings of the Samiti members and the activities of the organisation proved beyond doubt that the *Gita* fostered most successfully a spirit of frenzied fanaticism which no consideration could check.<sup>23</sup> In the Alipur Bomb Case, Mr. Norton said, "The secret society at the Manicktola garden house in Calcutta had three departments of which one was spiritual. Upendranath Banerjee was in charge of the spiritual department and he taught the *Gita* to the members of the society, for the type of political work undertaken by the members of the society required immense strength of spirit."<sup>24</sup> This came to a large extent from the pursuit of the Vedanta Religion." Three copies of the *Gita* were found in the Manicktola garden house.<sup>25</sup> The teachings of the *Gita*, which the revolutionaries imbibed, enhanced their power of resistance to police oppression. The revolutionaries sought to make a practical application of the teachings of the *Gita*. It became a more formidable weapon than the bomb in their hands. It prepared them psychologically, for the political murders which were interpreted as designed by God's will and this assured them of salvation through death in God's service.<sup>26</sup>

The spirit of total surrender to God's will as taught in the *Gita* became one of the main themes of the political literature of the Bengal Revolutionaries. The revolutionary newspapers of this age also preached nationalism as a religion. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, in his paper the *Sandhya*, preached the teachings of the *Gita*. The *Sandhya* in its issue of September 27, 1907, wrote, "The teachings of the *Gita* should not be lost sight of. As humble agents of God, we should kill those whom He had already destroyed."<sup>27</sup> The motto printed on the front page of the *Yugantar* newspaper was taken from the *Gita* (4, 7-8) and read as follows : "When there is decay of righteousness, Oh Bharata, and there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I send forth (incarnate

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23. Home Political Deposit, August 1909, No. 21, Report by H.L. Salkeld on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, National Archives, New Delhi.

24. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 61.

25. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 44.

26. Amales Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, p. 136.

27. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 147.



myself); for the protection of the good for the destruction of the evil doers, and for the firm establishment of righteousness, I am born from age to age.”<sup>28</sup> On the question of removing obstacles from the path, the *Yugantar* of December 28, 1907, added, “Kill the destroyer of your religion, kill him who throws obstacles in the path of your duty or religion, no matter whether he is rich or poor, a zamindar or raja, officer of government or an emperor.”<sup>29</sup> The *Yugantar* in its issue of May 20, 1908, wrote, “The Shastras say - Be he brother, or father or son, kill him if he be a traitor, there is no sin in it.”<sup>30</sup> Here we find the *Yugantar* trying to justify murder and vengeance by citing from the Hindu religious texts. A picture of the scene before the battle with Arjuna in his chariot and Sri Krishna holding the reins beside him, also adorned the front page of Aurobindo Ghosh’s paper, the *Karmayogin*.<sup>31</sup>

Another religious book which found a prominent place in the revolutionary literature was the *Markandeya Chandi*. Four copies of this work were found at the Manicktola garden house in Calcutta.<sup>32</sup> The Sanskrit work *Markandeya Chandi* is a sacred religious text of the Hindus, Chandi being another name of Goddess Durga who protects her devotees from all sorts of evils by destroying their enemies. The work relates how the gods, driven from the Heaven by the demons, created with all their powers Goddess Kali or Chandika or Adya Sakti (primordial energy), to destroy the demons.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Goddess Kali became the most favourite deity of the Bengal Revolutionaries for they used to take the most solemn vows before her image. They also used to refer to the outrages committed by them as ‘Mayer Lila’ viz. the playful wish of the Mother.<sup>34</sup> On 6th June, 1907, in an article in the *New India*, B.C. Pal wrote, “Sakti worship had been a part of our religion from time immemorial..., the masses must be initiated in the mysteries of Sakti worship... I can not conceive of a better symbol of Sakti in our present condition that the symbol of Kali, not conceived as a supernatural deity, but simply as the symbol of cosmic evolution on the one side and of

28. *Ibid.*, p. 128, f.n. Lord Zetland, *The Heart of Aryavarta*, (London, 1925), p. 124.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

31. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 46

32. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

34. Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt, *The Sedition Committee Report*, 1918, Appendix (1) IX., f.n. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

race-consciousness on the other... I do not feel any hesitation to recommend the Kali symbol to those of my countrymen to whom it may really appeal as an inspiration for the cultivation of Sakti (power)... Kali is thus an excellent symbol of Sakti both in its natural and national aspects. Kali is naked because possessed by the spirit of goodness it has lost consciousness of itself... Nakedness (of kali) symbolises disattachment and it is the sign of selfless-ness... Sakti is never manifested except in and through conflict... And we need this worship today more than we did in the past. All strength seems to have gone out of the nation... our people must realise that the highest good can only reach itself out in this world through bitter struggles; and the symbol of Kali may well be utilised now to arouse the dormant energies of the nation and to lead it on to realise its highest destiny through conflicts and struggles... I would therefore recommend the organisation of Kali Puja in every important village every moon-day. It cannot be the ordinary Kali Puja... Rakshakali is the Kali which protects from the evil. It would not be a bad thing if we could organise public Rakshakali Puja at the present juncture where large crowds could be collected. It would put courage into drooping hearts. It would impart a religious meaning and significance to our national movement... And thus these ceremonials would strengthen the determination of our people on the one hand and simultaneously demoralise those who are trying to repress them on the other".<sup>35</sup> In his book entitled, *Soul of India*, Pal wrote elaborately on Shakti or the Goddess of Power. In his opinion, Shakti had many forms, and one of these was the spirit of nationality.<sup>36</sup> Shakti manifested herself at different stages of evolution by taking the form of different Goddesses such as Jagaddhatri, Kali and Durga. The aim and objective of evolution was to save and to develop the principle of love and goodness in the world, and so Kali, the fearful Goddess, adorned with the skulls of the killed, covered with blood, stood on Shiva or the Good, who lay prostrate at her feet.<sup>37</sup> Pal wrote, "The Mother whom we worship as Jagaddhatri, Kali or Durga or Bhawani is however no mere racial symbol or deity..."<sup>38</sup> Our religion is the organised expression of the soul of the Mother. This cult of the Mother is based upon the Hindu

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35. Quoted in J.C.Ker, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 41-44.

36. B.c. Pal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 137.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 149.



conception of the Motherhood of God.<sup>39</sup> It is therefore, that our love of our land and people is an organic part of our ideal of the love of God... The real cult of Mother among us is part of our general spiritual culture... The true cult of the Mother is therefore with us, as much a cult of nationality, as of humanity..."<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note that B.C. Pal, who had embraced Brahmoism in his early life, now came to the defence of Puranic Hinduism. The Puranic Gods, said Pal, belonged to a later stage of the religious evolution - the imaginative stage. They should be regarded "not as idols but as what may be called "ideols", not gross material images but refined spiritual imageries".<sup>41</sup> Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, at a meeting held on August 9, 1907, at Kalighat, Calcutta, said "At the altar of Kali, both the sin and the virtue of the *feringhi* needed to be sacrificed."<sup>42</sup>

"The Motherland is no other than Divinity itself", declared Aurobindo Ghosh, "the Motherland in all her beauty and splendour represents Goddess Durga of our worship".<sup>43</sup> Sister Nivedita's book entitled, *Kali, the Mother* made Aurobindo view violence from a new angle, as the play of Sakti (or power).<sup>44</sup> Nivedita, for the first time, called the sword an incarnation of kali.<sup>45</sup> She wrote, "...To Her (Kali) we belong, we are Her children<sup>46</sup>.... Arise, My child and go forth a man...forget not that I...am thy Mother...Ask nothing, seek nothing, plan nothing. Let My will flow through thee...I, kali, am the Mother of the nation...Be steadfast in the toil I set for thee. Shrink from no demand that the task makes on thee..."<sup>47</sup> Aurobindo also wrote the *Durga Stotra* in Bengali which was a passionate appeal to the Goddess of Shakti to make Herself manifest. It was both an acknowledgement of the present plight of national degradation and a stirring call for the resurgence of the spirit. "Mother Durga...make our efforts great... make us true to our resolve..."<sup>48</sup>

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39. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-161.

41. Amares Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

42. K.C. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 147.

43. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

45. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 57.

46. Sister Nivedita, *Kali, the Mother*, (Almora, 1950), p. 21.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86.

48. Kishore Gandhi (ed.) *Contemporary Relevance of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 132, f.n. *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1967, pp. 5-7.



Barindra Kumar Ghosh, younger brother of Aurobindo and a revolutionary, admitted in his confession, that since a purely political propaganda would not serve their purpose of achieving India's freedom, they thought of educating the young recruits, who joined the Samiti, in religious books. The idea behind this was to train up the boys spiritually to face the gravest dangers.<sup>49</sup>

Another revolutionary, Sri Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, wrote, in his book *In Search of Freedom*, "Before we went to commit a dacoity, we used to make offerings to Goddess kali and we carried the offered prasad and flowers with us so that the Mother's blessings be with us in our performance of the sacred duty for the fulfilment of the great mission of our life i.e. to free the Motherland from alien bondage."<sup>50</sup>

The newspapers also published articles on the necessity of worshipping Goddess kali and sought to justify the use of violence and murder for the purpose of achieving the country's freedom by describing them as forming an essential part of the worship of the Goddess kali. In an article published in the *Sandhya* of 6th May, 1907, we read, "It is a matter of great rejoicing that an excellent kind of bomb is being manufactured. This bomb is called "Kali Mai's Boma" (the bomb of Mother kali)... A son is wanted from every family who must practise the virtues of the Kshatriya (warrior), Let them play with Kali Mai's Boma". The *Yugantar* in an article wrote, "The Mother is thirsty and is pointing out to her sons the only thing that can quench that thirst. Nothing less than human blood and decapitated human heads will satisfy her. Let her sons worship her with these offerings...On the day, on which the Mother is worshipped in this way in every village...On that day the crown of independence will fall into their hands."<sup>51</sup> In the *Suprabhat Magazine*, a poem entitled, "The Auspicious time for worship", said, "The Mother's worship can no longer be performed with fruits and flowers. The Mother's hunger can no longer be appeased with words only. Blood is wanted, heads are wanted, workers are wanted, warriors and heroes are wanted, labour is wanted and firm

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49. Freedom Papers on Alipur Bomb Case, Paper No.100 A, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

50. J.C. Chatterjee, *In Serch of Freedom*, (Calcutta, 1967), pp. 26-27.

51. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 74, 71.

vows and bands of followers.”<sup>52</sup> How extensively the religious ideas of the *Chandi* were pressed into the service of the revolutionists is also apparent from an examination of some of their writings, found in the book, *Kabya Kusum* (Poetical Blossoms) 1908 (1315 B.E.), written by Dinesh Chandra Sengupta, who appears to have been the recognised poet of the movement. On page 82 of this book there was an *abahan* or invocation of Kali, who was given numerous epithets in the course of the poem. The poet wrote, “... Devils are committing oppression on us... Come O Mother Bhairabi...the earth oppressed by demons, is calling you in a pathetic tone....India is one vast crematorium and demons are responsible...Come you merciful one, taking up the sword to destroy the wicked devils.” Here the British government was compared with the demons or devils. Among the members of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, the *Chandi* thus became a means of investing revolutionary ideas with a religious garb. The idea of the Sakti-Puja was taken entirely in idea and largely verbatim from the *Chandi*. Exhibit 1132 A is a Pocket copy of the *Chandi* with the name Ashutosh Dasgupta pencilled on the leaves and it is numbered 287 in the Anushilan Library catalogue. A few more copies of the *Chandi* are found in the Anushilan Samiti catalogue. Not only were the teachings of the *Chandi* and the *Gita* reduced to one great command, ‘destroy’, but we also find that in the book, *Barttaman Rananiti* (October, 1907, on 20th Aswin B.E. 1314), the author and publisher, Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, discussed the practical steps to be taken for accomplishing the work of destruction. He described destruction as a form of creation which was natural. Therefore, war was also natural and imperative when every means of preventing oppression was of no avail. It was for this reason that Sri Krishna acted as the Charioteer of Arjun at the battle of Kurukshetra and for this reason the incarnation of kali as “kali holding two swords to destroy the Mlechhas” had passed into a saying of the Shastras. ‘Karma’ or action was the means of salvation and the wealth of man. In India, the representative of ‘karma’ was Durga, having ten arms holding ten kinds of weapons, possessing infinite power and She was the mother of creation. Strength of arms was needed to establish a virtuous kingdom or *Dharmarajya* after demolishing the vicious one. Thus this book placed the revolutionary movement on a religious basis and upheld the philosophy of the *Gita* and the stories of the *Chandi* in order

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52. *Ibid.*, p. 80.



to appeal to the religious sentiment of the revolutionaries, so that the revolutionaries would be fired with religious enthusiasm which would probably make up for their lack of formal training in arms.<sup>53</sup> From the book, *Barttaman Rananiti*, we also come to know that the Mahratta war cry, "Hara, Hara Mahadeo" was adopted at the Samiti mock fights and seemed also to have been part of the daily routine in the Samiti. Ananta Mohan Chatterji said that after performing the ablutions, the members stood in a line and chanted the hymns named 'Bhagabati Stotra' as well as other hymns in chorus.<sup>54</sup> Other books found in the Dacca Anushilan Samiti were the various writings of Swami Vivekananda such as *Bharate Vivekananda*, *Sri Sri Ramkrishner Upadesh*, *Chicago Baktrita*, *Raja Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Life and teachings of Vivekananda*, *A study of Religion*, *Thoughts of Vedanta*, *Religion of love*. The members of this Samiti also seemed to be God-fearing and believed in the notions of virtue and vice, for we find that the latter maintained diaries in which they maintained a form which may be called 'Lapses Register', where various vices were written down.<sup>55</sup>

Revolutionary documents such as letters, orders, proclamations and pamphlets were commonly headed with the hindu invocation 'OM'. This shows that the revolutionaries sought to endow all their writings with religious sanction.<sup>56</sup> The Revolutionaries also studied, the Ramayana, the *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads*, and the lives of Saints such as Trailanga Swami, Bhaskarananda Saraswati, Sri Chaitanaya, Sisir Kumar Ghose's *Amiya Nimai Charit*.<sup>57</sup>

The Sedition Committee's Report (1918) also recorded the religious trend in the Bengal Revolutionary Movement, and stated, "For their own initiates, the conspirators devised a remarkable series of text books. The Bhagavad Gita and the writings of Vivekananda formed a part of the course." The revolutionaries themselves admitted in their writings that they learnt from these religious books the lesson of self-sacrifice and the spirit of performing work without any attachment for the result.<sup>58</sup>

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53. Home Political Deposit, August, 1909, No. 21. H.L. Salkeld's Report on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, National Archives, New Delhi.

54. Ibid., f.n. *Barttaman Rananiti*, p. 86.

55. Ibid.

56. Lord Zetland, *The Heart of Aryavarta*, p. 103.

57. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92.

58. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 63, 176.



A religious pamphlet, the *Bhawani Mandir*, written by Aurobindo in 1905, exhorted the readers to invoke the blessings of Shakti (physical, mental, moral and spiritual strength) so that they might become fit soldiers in the struggle for freedom. A temple of Bhawani or Kali was to be erected far away from the contamination of modern cities and a new order of *karmayogins*, always ready to renounce everything in the cause of the Mother, should be organised. The knowledge enshrined in the ancient gospel of the Vedanta should be striven for attainment. It would be made optional for the political devotees to become sannyasis (ascetics).<sup>59</sup> Most of them were to remain brahmacharins (celibates) till the liberation of the Motherland was achieved. It is evident that the idea of Bhawani Mandir was taken from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's famous book *Ananda-math*.<sup>60</sup> "In the present age, the Mother is manifested as pure *Shakti*...we in India fail in all things for want of *Shakti*... Our knowledge is a dead thing for want of *Shakti*...our *Bhakti* cannot live and work for want of *Shakti*... One thing is wanting, which we must strive to acquire before all others, that is strength--strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others...India has to be reborn if India is to survive...but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of *Tamas*, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons...to get rid of *Tamas* we have but to awaken the Brahma within...In everyone...from the Raja on his throne to the pariah walking shunned of men, God liveth...We are facets and manifestations of the Almighty Power...Rebirth (of India) is demanded by the future of the world because it is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religions, sciences and philosophies and make mankind one soul...there is no instance in history of a more marvellous and sudden upsurge of strength in a nation than modern Japan. The sources of the mighty awakening of Japan were drawn from religion, from the Vedantic teachings of Oyomei and the recovery of Shintoism with its worship of the national shakti of Japan in the image and person of Mikado...India's need of drawing from the fountain of religion is far greater than that of Japan...We have to create strength where it did not exist before...we will therefore build a temple to the White Bhawani, the

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59. K.c. Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 130.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

Mother of Strength, the Mother of India. Adoration will be dead and ineffective unless it is transmuted into *karma*. We will therefore have a Math with a new order of *karmayogins* attached to the temple, men who have renounced all in order to work for the Mother. Some may, if they choose, be complete sannyasis, most will be *Brahmacharins* who will return to *Grihasthashram* (household) when their allotted work is finished...*Bhakti* and *karma* cannot be perfect and enduring unless they are based upon *Jnana* or knowledge. The *Brahmacharins* will be therefore taught to fill their souls, the basis of their knowledge be the great soham, the mighty formula of the Vedanta..." The work and rules of the New Order of *Sannyasins* would be as follows - All who undertook the life of *Brahmacharins* for the Mother would have to dedicate themselves to her service for four years after which they would be free to continue to work or return to family life. All money received by them in the Mother's name would go to the Mother's service. Half of the proceeds received from publication of books must be contributed to the service of the Mother. There would be no gradation of rank among the workers. Their chief work would be mass education and to help the poor and the ignorant which they would strive to effect in various ways such as lectures and demonstrations as suited to an uneducated intelligence, night schools, religious teachings and nursing the sick and conducting work of charity and various works of public utility in the big towns and elsewhere connected especially with the education and religious life. They would also approach the zamindars, landlords and rich men to promote sympathy between zamindars and peasants and to turn the minds of the rich men to work of public beneficence and charity. Finally, as soon as funds permitted, some of them would be sent to foreign countries to study lucrative arts and manufactures, and on their return they would establish with the aid of the order, factories and workshops and would devote their lives to the sending of more students for study abroad.<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note here that the National Council of Education in Bengal was established almost with the same object in 1906, and Aurobindo became the Principal of the Bengal National College. Though the language of religion was apparently used in this book, the emphasis was on reviving the nation's

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61. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram : Early Political Writings*, (Pondicherry, 1973), pp. 61-74.



strength. The Sedition Committee Report, 1918, commented that the book *Bhawani Mandir* preached the gospel of force and strength as necessary conditions of political freedom, and the combination of religious, social and political views was clearly brought out in the rules laid down to govern the new order. Subsequently the revolutionary societies in Bengal injected the principles and rules advocated in this book with the Russian ideals of revolutionary violence, and samities formed after 1908 gradually gave more emphasis on the terroristic side, giving less importance to the religious ideas.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting to note in this connection that a vow of austerity and celibacy was almost compulsory for the young recruits of the various secret societies.<sup>63</sup> A study of the history sheets and statements of the Bengal Revolutionaries of the period under discussion also corroborates the fact that the majority of the Revolutionaries were young and unmarried, and maintained celibacy.

The Bengal Revolutionaries equated the ideal of unqualified freedom with God. B.C. Pal preached, "Freedom is inherent in the very making of man...as God is eternally free, so are you, prince or peasant, Brahman or Pariah, man or woman, Hindu or Mohammedan, Buddhist or Christian, rich or poor, ignorant or learned, free and eternal."<sup>64</sup> It is relevant to note in this connection that Pal also cited the teachings of the Vedanta in order to stress his views in this regard. The message of the Vedanta is that every man has within himself, in his own soul, as the very root and the realization of his own being, the spirit of God; and, as God, is eternally free, and self realised. Freedom is man's birth right."<sup>65</sup> In the *Bande Mataram* paper also we have a beautiful presentation of this ideal, "God made man essentially and potentially free and pure... Freedom is constitutional in man..."<sup>66</sup> The *Bande Mataram* Magazine wrote that man is forever and inalienably free.<sup>67</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries also regarded themselves as mere servants of God. In a significant letter written to his wife (February,

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62. *Sedition Committee's Report, 1918*, S.A.T. Rowlatt, p. 67.

63. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 93.

64. M.A. Buch, *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism*, (Baroda, 1940), Vol. III, p. 90.

65. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

66. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 83-84.

67. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Magazine (micro-filmed) August 4, 1907, article entitled 'The Issue', Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.



1907) Aurobindo confessed that he was a toy in the hands of God.<sup>68</sup> Every member of the Anushilan Samiti looked upon himself as such. Pulin Bihari Das, the leader of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, was intensely religious, so was Barrister P. Mitra, the founder of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti. We were *karmayogins*. Our karma (action) was a part of the yoga (salvation). We thought that without making ourselves men of sterling character we could not achieve our political objective. To serve the country was the religious duty of the members of the Samiti. Anushilan's main task was the formation of character of a high order, and this required a living faith, and the Samiti found this faith in religion," wrote Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, a revolutionary, in his book entitled, *In Search of Freedom*.<sup>69</sup> We find this idea of '*karmayogins*' in a more elaborate and developed form, in Aurobindo's magazine, the *Karmayogin*, (1909), where he wrote, "the object of the *Karmayogin* will be to read the heart of our religion, our society, our philosophy, politics, literature, art, science, jurisprudence, everything that was and is ours. We must return to seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purpose of our future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India's eternal life and nature...we aim at the building up of a nation. We shall devote ourselves to the national religion or the Sanatan dharma, i.e. the eternal religion...The religion of India is nothing if it is not lived. It has to be applied not only to life but to the whole of life; its spirit has to enter into and mould our society, our politics...to understand the heart of this dharma, to experience it as a truth, and to execute it in life is what we understand by *karmayoga*. We believe that by the yoga India will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness, and by the yoga she will keep the strength to preserve it...First therefore become Indians...Recover Vedanta, Gita and Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives...Believe in the Mother, serve Her, lose your wills in Her, your egoism in the greater ego of the country...Recover the sources of all strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you, social soundness, intellectual pre-eminence, political freedom...*karmayoga* is the application of Vedanta and yoga to life..."<sup>70</sup> The object of yoga is

68. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 132.

69. J.C. Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 25-26.

70. The *Karmayogin*, microfilmed, 5th Ashadh, 1316, B.E. Jaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

realisation of the Divine Personality as well as development of the powers of the soul.<sup>71</sup> Aurobindo's yoga is however different from the ordinary yogas of Bhakti, Jnana and karma. It goes beyond mind to what he calls the 'super mind', and according to him, forces of the super mind must be brought down on the earth to transform the mind, life and body of a man. It accepts nothing but complete self-surrender. Aurobindo was in full agreement with the idea of Vivekananda regarding the universality of the Brahman.<sup>72</sup> It is relevant to mention in this connection that Aurobindo claimed to have been spiritually guided by Swami Vivekananda. He expressed his spiritual indebtedness to Vivekananda in the following words, "while I was in prison he (Vivekananda) appeared before me for days. So long I could not understand fully, he went on teaching me."<sup>73</sup> This sort of psychic communication with the spirit of Swamiji at a critical moment of his life indicates the spell which the writings of Swamiji cast upon Aurobindo.<sup>74</sup>

Bhupendranath Dutta, an important revolutionary leader, preached a sort of neo-Vedantism, like that preached by Swami Vivekananda. In an editorial article in the *Sandhya* he said, "First free the Mother from her bondage, then seek your own deliverance." He also preached the idea of God-appointed mission of Swaraj. Addressing the British rulers, he wrote, "Our power is more than human. It is divine. We have heard the voice telling us that the period of India's suffering is about to close."<sup>75</sup> What he implied by this idea was that the work of achieving Swaraj was a duty ordained by God. The same idea was expressed by Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram* magazine : "...In reality work is done by the will of God."<sup>76</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries preached the concept of the divinity of the Motherland. It is quite clear from the writings and speeches of Aurobindo that he looked upon India as a living and pulsating spiritual entity,<sup>77</sup> and revered her as the Goddess incarnate who, for centuries,

71. *Ibid.*, 24 July, 1909, 8th Shraban, 1316, B.E.

72. A.B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, (Pondicherry, 1958), pp. 186-187, 307.

73. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyaya, Shankari Prasad Basu and Sankar (eds), *Visva Vivek*, (Calcutta, 1963), pp. 164-165.

74. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

76. The *Bande Mataram*, weekly magazine, 22nd March, 1908, microfilmed.

77. K. Singh, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay, 1970), p. 75.



had cradled and nourished her children and who was suffering utterly from the oppression by the British Government. In his essay on Bankim, he says, "It is not till the motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a sketch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great divine and maternal power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart, that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service and the patriotism, that works miracles and saves a doomed nation, is born."<sup>78</sup> This above quoted passage reveals a sort of spiritual patriotism, which went deeper than the normal sense of patriotism and sought to establish a stronger and closer bond between the mind of the patriot and the motherland on the basis of religion.

In Aurobindo's opinion, nationalism was a religion that had emanated from God.<sup>79</sup> As a natural concomitant of his theory of spiritual nationalism, we find that Aurobindo frequently claimed that the nationalist movement, sparked off by the Bengal Partition, was a divinely inspired and divinely guided movement. This is evident from his inspiring speeches delivered during the fateful days of the anti-partition agitation.<sup>80</sup> Of course, the divinity of the Motherland was an ancient concept from the historical standpoint, for it has been found in many ancient religious texts of India and also in other ancient civilizations. Aurobindo's contribution was to mould this concept in order to serve the national purpose, and thereby to convert it into an epitome of great strength and inspiration and to make political use of the concept.<sup>81</sup> Aswani Kumar Ganguly also stated that their motto was to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the liberation of the Motherland.<sup>82</sup> This shows that he and his compatriots believed in the divinity of the Motherland. But, this concept of divinity of the Motherland was not given much importance by the Bengal revolutionaries of the later period, as is evident from the oral interviews taken of some revolutionaries such as Sri Sunil Das, Sri Ganesh Ghosh and Smt. Bina Bhowmik. The later

78. *Ibid.*, p. 74, f.p. *The Bande Mataram*, April 16, 1907.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

82. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly at his residence in Calcutta on 19.4.1983.



held the British Government responsible for all their sufferings and miseries, and sought to remedy the situation by ousting the British, but did not look upon their movement as a divinely guided one.<sup>83</sup>

Some Bengal revolutionaries other than Aurobindo also explicitly stated that the nationalist movement was a spiritual movement. In B.C. Pal's words, "Politics in India was a spiritual movement."<sup>84</sup> Aurobindo, however, went one step further and remarked, "The new movement in India is an intensely spiritual movement, having for its object not simply the development of economic life or the attainment of political freedom but really the emancipation in every sense of the term of the Indian manhood and womanhood."<sup>85</sup>

Every member of the secret societies in Bengal had to take an oath. According to Bhupendranath Dutta, this *mantra* or vow of initiation was brought from Maharashtra, and during such initiation, the members were told about the establishment of *Dharmarajya*. Here the influence of Maharashtra is clearly visible because this was the ideal of Guru Ramdas, the spiritual preceptor of Sivaji. "In my case (Bhupendranath's case) as I refused to take the oath in the name of the Hindu *shastra*, arrangement was made for my taking the oath by touching different religious scriptures."<sup>86</sup> Statements of the six boys who were found in the Dacca Anushilan Samiti on 4th November, 1908, i.e. the day on which a case was instituted against Pulin Behari Das, prove that the special vow was hung near an image of kali. This image showed Goddess Kali in her most repulsive form. Both the image and the vow were identified by these boys, and it was well proved that, whether the image of Kali was actually touched or not, the vow was taken before the goddess in order to give it the most binding religious sanction to a Hindu. Some members of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti had also to take a special vow which ran as follows, "In the name of God, father, mother, preceptor, leader and mother country, I make this solemn vow that I will not be bound by any tie for my father, mother, relatives, kinsmen, friends, hearth and home until the mission of this Samiti is fulfilled.

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83. Oral Interviews taken of Sri Sunil Das, Sri Ganesh Ghosh, Sm. Bina Bhowmik at their respective residences at Calcutta respectively on 2.2.84, 4.11.82., 2.7.83.

84. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

85. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 170-171.

86. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, (Calcutta, 1983), pp. 44-45.

That I will not hesitate to make any sacrifice in the discharge of the work of this Samiti...that I will bring everything to the knowledge of the authorities if anyone breaks this or any other vow for the taking of the necessary steps against it, that if I flinch from this solemn vow or in any way act contrarily, the curse of God, of mother and the mighty sages will destroy me ere long." When we realize the mad frenzy inspired in so many members of this Samiti by the imagined insults of "the mother", the contempt of bodily suffering and death inculcated by the teaching of the Gita, and the hero-worship of Khudiram and Profulla, we shall see how supremely dangerous this vow was. A similar vow was found in the diary book of Sushil Kumar Sen of Baniachung, Sylhet. The object of the vow was the establishment of *Dharmarajya* in India and the meaning of *Dharmarajya* was made clear by the invocation of Kali, the Gita and also by the taking up of a sword. The idea of punishing those who were antagonistic to one's religion was a very novel doctrine among the Hindus. Obviously their religion was not the ordinary Hindu religion, but some peculiar military belief. The revolutionary societies in India worked largely with the help of religion, particularly the religion of the Gita. In fact, the pursuit of their aim became a religion and was followed with that enthusiasm which could be only associated with religion. In other words, we may say that there was a 'Samiti religion', and those who were antagonistic to it were liable to punishment and were looked upon as enemies of the 'mother'. All this was very clearly and concisely explained at the beginning of the vow taken by the Sylhet revolutionaries: "From today I take up the task of setting up *Dharmarajya* in India by removing and doing away with all obstacles. I do hereby offer my life to achieve this end." This idea came directly from the *Gita* and connects this vow with the *Yugantar*. Sri Bhupendra Kumar Datta, in an oral interview, stated that he took the oath as a member of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti by taking a revolver in his hand and holding a copy of the Gita on his head. The vows were divided into *Adya* (preliminary), *Madhya* (secondary) and *Anta Pratijna* (final oaths).<sup>87</sup> Sri Surendra Mohan Ghose, another revolutionary, related that he took the oath by holding the Gita in his hand and was given a knife by Hemendra Kishore Acharya Choudhury, the leader of the Sadhana Samaj of Mymensingh, for taking out his blood and writing

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87. Home Political Deposit, August, 1909, No. 21, Report by H.L. Salkeld on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti.



the oath with it, and that thereby he became a member of the Sadhana Samaj.<sup>88</sup> Members of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti and the Dacca Anushilan Samiti had to take their vows and go through a ceremony of initiation by lying flat on a human skeleton.<sup>89</sup>

The Birastami celebration was already popular in Bengal. The secret societies had no difficulty in continuing that tradition in appearance while imbuing it with a new spirit.<sup>90</sup>

As regards the question of participation of the missionaries of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in the Bengal revolutionary movement, it may be said that during the Swadeshi movement or anti-partition agitation in Bengal both the Government and the politicians expected the Mission to side with them. The Mission was on the horns of a dilemma - mis-understood by some and misinterpreted by others.<sup>91</sup> To the subject nation, politics and religion became so inextricably mixed up, that the nation readily responded to Swami Vivekananda's clarion call to shake off its inertia, and the latter soon became the idol of the youth of Bengal. So in the wake of the struggle for national independence, the Bengal Revolutionaries interpreted Swamiji's message from both the political and national points of view.<sup>92</sup> It was true that Sister Nivedita, the Irish disciple of Vivekananda, identified herself heart and soul with the nationalist movement in India. Yet, there was the emphatic direction of Swamiji that the organisation was to steer clear of politics.<sup>93</sup> The Belur Math authorities made a rule that strangers would not be allowed to stay overnight in any of their centres. The Mission had no organic connection with politics and under the guidance of Swami Brahmananda and Saradananda, and Saradananda, it tried by all means not to get embroiled in the political struggle. But, certain factors over which they had no control conspired against them. In addition to the confessions of political suspects, the police were

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88. Oral History : Interview with Sri Surendra Mohan Ghose on 27th February, 1968, by Sri K.P. Rangachary and Dr. Hari Dev Sharma for the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

89. Freedom Papers. An Account of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal Part I & II (Non. Conf.), West Bengal, State Archives, Calcutta.

90. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 68.

91. Swami Gambhirananda, *Op. Cit.*, p. 206.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 209-211.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.



intrigued to find the books of Swami Vivekananda, possessed by almost all of them. This made them all the more suspicious of the Mission.<sup>94</sup> "These missionaries are suspected of preaching Swaraj and Brahmananda alias Rakhal Ghose has been described as leader of these men."<sup>95</sup> In 1914, when it came to the notice of the monks that the good name of the Ramakrishna movement was being exploited by some misguided people to secure young recruits, nominally for spiritual service but actually for ulterior purposes, the Mission published a warning and statement in which it completely dissociated itself from all shades of active politics, reiterated its religious background and motive of social service, and disowned all the so-called Ramakrishna Societies which were not legally affiliated to the original Ramakrishna Math and Mission.<sup>96</sup> On March 26, 1917, Lord Carmichael, the then governor of Bengal exonerated the Mission and its members saying, "...I know the character of the Mission's work is entirely non-political..."<sup>97</sup>

Earlier, however, searches made during the Manicktola Conspiracy Case had revealed that some members of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti used to visit from time to time the Belur Math.<sup>98</sup> Searches made in connection with the Alipur Bomb Case at 117, Amherst Street, showed that about 30 students of the Bengal National College together with some members of the Anushilan Samiti had acted as volunteers at the Belur Math during the Vivekananda anniversary. Pulin Mukherjee and Satish Bose, both of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti, had helped at the festival of Belur Math in 1912. A number of members of the Yugantar Party and the Anushilan Samiti such as Rashbehari Basu, Amarendranath Chatterjee, Upendranath Banerjee, Rishikesh Kanji Lal, Indranath Nandi, Debabrata Bose, Sachindra Kumar Sen, Makhanlal Sen, Tulsi Chandra Datta, Jogendra Nath Thakur, Prio Nath Das, Profulla Chakravarty, Atul Guha and Bhupendranath Dutta used to visit the Math and were personally known to the *Sannyasins*, and some of them later joined this institution by giving up politics altogether.<sup>99</sup>

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.

95. Freedom Papers, No.45. (non-conf.), Note on Ramakrishna Mission, I.B. Records, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

96. Swami Gambhirananda, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 213-214.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 218, f.n. Second General Report of the Mission.

98. Freedom Papers, No. 45, *Op. Cit.*, f.n. S1-182-FN 6/15 R.K.M. p. 16.

99. *Ibid.*

It is true that the Mission gave shelter to a number of revolutionaries who were political suspects. For instance, Debabrata Bose and Sachin Sen, both accused and afterwards acquitted as not guilty in the Alipur Bomb Case, sought admission to the Belur Math in 1909. Swami Saradananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, accepted them, and stood guarantee for their good behaviour. They even received spiritual initiation from the Holy Mother (Sarada Devi) and became regular members of the Order (Swamis Prajnananda and Chinmayananda). However, they never betrayed the trust placed in them by Saradananda.<sup>100</sup> Bhupendranath Datta, on his release in July, 1908, stayed in the Belur Math for a time before he left for America.<sup>101</sup> Finally, it may be said that the members of the Mission had every sympathy for the national struggle though they scrupulously avoided active participation in politics because otherwise the very existence of the Mission would be in danger. They were also outspoken in their condemnation of Government repression and second to none in extending their helping hands to the families of political sufferers.<sup>102</sup>

In conclusion, it may be said that the religious orientation of the Bengal Revolutionaries was more sympathetic towards the Hindu religion than to Islam. The revolutionaries were mostly inspired by a type of Hindu nationalism. Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee stated in his book *In Search of Freedom* that they had no Muslims in their Samiti. The rituals that the members had to perform and most of the ideals that they held, scarcely attracted the Muslims.<sup>103</sup> No Muslim was admitted to the Dacca Anushilan Samiti as it was clearly enjoined in the programme of the Samiti that "None who is not a Hindu or is a hater of the Hindus shall be admitted."<sup>104</sup> Since almost all the revolutionaries of this period were Hindus by birth and most of the nationalists in Bengal were Hindus, it was but quite natural for the revolutionaries to look to the Hindu sacred texts such as the *Gita*, the *Chandi*, and the Upanishads for inspiration and guidance in their life and death struggle against the

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100. Swami Gambhirananda, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 219-220.

101. Freedom Paper No. 45, *Op. Cit.*

102. Swami Gambhirananda, *Op. Cit.*, p. 222.

103. J.C. Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 57.

104. Home Department Political A., (conf.) F.No. 70-71, February, 1908, National Archives, New Delhi.



British rulers of this country. Moreover, the Bengali Muslims in general, supported in their own interests the partition of Bengal, and remained loyal to the British rule. During the Anti-partition movement, some Muslim leaders like the Nawab of Dacca openly sided with the British Government in the hope of gaining some pecuniary rewards and other concessions. The great majority of the Bengal revolutionaries were rather secular in their political outlook in spite of their Hindu religious orientation. They, in fact, embraced everyone, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, who sympathised with their cause and supported their political ideals. B.C. Pal said, "I am personally neither Hindu nor Mohammedan in the religious sense. From a longer view I may honestly claim to be both Hindu and Mohammedan." He even encouraged the idea of building up a secular State in India.<sup>105</sup> Aurobindo was also aware of the Hindu-Muslim differences, which generally kept the two communities poles apart and occasionally led to communal riots. He expressed the view in the *Karmayogin*, that it would be suicidal to treat the Hindus and the Muslims as permanently separate units for their unity was essential for the growth of a "single or indivisible Indian nation." He further wrote, "We must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Mussalman brother remembering always that in him too Narayan dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom..."<sup>106</sup> Thus it is wrong to hold that the religious idealism of the Bengal revolutionaries was responsible for the growth of communalism in India. The greater part of the Muslim community remained thoroughly loyal to the British rule both before and after the Swadeshi movement.

Finally it may be remarked that the religious ideas cherished and preached by the Bengal revolutionaries, indirectly encouraged conservative sentiments in the social sphere to some extent. Some of the revolutionaries such as Purna Das, Suresh Das, Mani Chaudhury were quite conservative in their social attitudes. Girin Banerjee was a great supporter of the caste system and conservative in his outlook.<sup>107</sup> But examples of such conservatism were more of an exception than a general rule.

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105. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 132.

106. The *Karmayogin*, 5th Ashadh, 1316. B.E.

107. J.C. Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.



**4**

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC  
IDEAS OF THE  
BENGAL REVOLUTIONARIES**

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## I

### **Social Ideas of the Bengal Revolutionaries**

Though the Bengal Revolutionaries did not have sufficient time and patience to look deeper into the causes that crippled the Indian society as a whole and the social problems of the time, they vehemently resisted the inflow of a mechanical, materialistic and individualistic civilization from outside which sought to engulf the traditional Indian culture and civilization.<sup>1</sup>

The main purpose of the social service undertaken by the Bengal revolutionaries in times of natural calamity like flood or epidemic was not simply philanthropic. The actual motive behind this was to come into direct and close contact with the masses of the country and thereby to gain their sympathy and support for the revolutionary cause. This would also enable the revolutionaries to disguise and hide among the masses in times of real danger, and hiding places were absolutely necessary for the revolutionaries to carry on their activities in secret, since the British Raj was always suspicious of their movement, and any sign of disloyalty to the government was regarded as an act of treason and grave offence punishable by death or imprisonment for life.<sup>2</sup> Aswini Kumar Ganguly, an ex-revolutionary, said in an interview, "In our

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1. Amares Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, pp. 1, 60.

2. Oral Interview taken of Sri Jibantara Haldar, an ex-revolutionary, at his residence in Calcutta on 28.7.83.



movement we sought to enlist the sympathy and support of the masses of Bengal through social service and social work.<sup>3</sup> The social service also served as a cloak to cover up effectively many misdeeds committed by the revolutionaries.<sup>4</sup> Another purpose of rendering social service was to inculcate the ideal of selfless dedication to the cause of the country. The pursuit of this ideal would help the revolutionaries earn the respect of their countrymen.<sup>5</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries preached the ideal of service to the poor, sick, downtrodden and helpless; and it was one of the main items in their agenda of work. "We need an institution in which, under the guidance of highly spiritual men, workers will be trained for every field, workers for self-defence, workers for arbitration, for sanitation, for famine relief, which were needed to bring about the necessary conditions for the organisation of Swaraj. If the country is to be free, it must first organise itself as to be able to maintain its freedom," wrote the *Bande Mataram* weekly magazine on 22nd March 1908.<sup>6</sup> In its issue of 5th April 1908, the paper further wrote, "The conditions of the poorer classes in this country can be neglected no longer if the blessing of God is to remain with our movement...there is a moral side to poverty which is even more important. The India peasantry is now being brutalized by unexampled oppression; attracted to the liquor shops which a benevolent government liberally supplies, and gradually driven to the same habits of looseness and brutality which disgrace the European proletariats... Since the educated classes are now the repositories of the hope of resurgence, it is to them that the masses look for guidance. Their duty is to be worthy of their mission, to bring hope, strength and light into the lives of their down-trodden countrymen... We must now set ourselves to the restoration of the moral tone of the nation by ourselves setting an example of mercy, justice, self-denial and patient work for the people. The young must set themselves to the task which

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3. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly at his residence in Calcutta on 19.4.83.
  4. Home Political Confidential History sheet of Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, No. 687, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  5. A.C. Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 93.
  6. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Magazine, 22nd March, 1908, article entitled, "The Need of the Moment", microfilmed, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

now calls us and bind the educated class and the masses together by the golden bond of love and service. This is the next step in the development of the present movement. We want now *Samities* for giving help and light to the masses...what our *samities* can do, is to take up the work, which we have indicated as a permanent part of their duties, put themselves in touch with the people, lead them to hope, inspire them with the spirit of self-help and organise them.”<sup>7</sup> Bepin Chandra Pal also plunged heart and soul into the battle against alcoholic drinks for the educated Bengalees of these times were, as a class, living a very free life of undisciplined appetites and un-restrained passions. From the political point of view also, Pal did not consider it expedient to rush to forcible prohibition; he rather preferred to rely upon growing public consciousness about its dangers. Prohibition became one of the chief planks of the nationalist movement, and when Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of prohibition during the 1920's, he only stepped on a track long trodden by Pal.<sup>8</sup>

Following the path envisaged by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Saint of Dakshineswar, the Samiti also devoted whole-heartedly to the service of the masses, of the poor and the needy. In order to help the poor and needy families, the members of the Anushilan Samiti used to beg alms from door to door, and the same was distributed among orphans, children and widows. The department which devoted itself to the service of the common people was known as ‘Daridra Bandhab Bhandar’. Responsible members were sent in groups to the flood-affected or famine-stricken areas for relief work, and for making arrangements for medical treatment.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay further stated in his book entitled *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti* that every Sunday the members of the Anushilan Samiti used to beg alms which were distributed in the late afternoon.<sup>10</sup> Both rural and urban *Samities* in Bengal, in order to help people, hard hit by soaring prices, raised funds by house to house collection of rice, known as ‘musti-bhiksha’. The rice collected in this way was distributed among the starving people or sold to obtain money, for purchasing daily necessities of the poor.<sup>11</sup>

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7. *Ibid.*, 5th April, 1908.

8. A.P. Mukherjee, *Social and Political Ideas of B.C. Pal*, pp. 33-36.

9. Jibantara Halder, *Anushilan Samiti Itihas*, p. 15.

10. Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay, *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti*, (Calcutta, 1363 B.S.), p. 272.

11. Freedom Papers, (non-conf.), An account of Samities in Bengal, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.



The Boycott and Swadeshi Movements created opportunities for the Anushilan Samiti for direct public participation in social service activities. One such major occasion offered itself in 1907, in connection with the 'Ardhodaya Yoga', a very sacred and auspicious occasion when thousands of pilgrims flocked to Calcutta for a holy dip in the Ganges. The Government arrangements for receiving them were inadequate and inefficient, but the Anushilan Samiti promptly stepped in, and their volunteers managed the entire affair so efficiently that the Samiti rose very high in public esteem.<sup>12</sup> Jiban Lal Chatterji, a member of Pulin Das's Anushilan Samiti at Dacca, confessed in his statement dated, 4th December 1916, that in 1913 he went to Burdwan for flood relief and worked there.<sup>13</sup> Dhirendra Ghatak, a prominent member of the Tangail Suhrid Samiti, also admitted that he went to the Burdwan flood relief work which was supervised by many revolutionary leaders.<sup>14</sup> Motilal Roy, a member of the Chandernagore group, related in his book, *Amar Dekha Biplab O Biplabi*, that he joined as a co-worker of Makhan Lal Sen in the flood relief work in Burdwan. Makhan Lal sent money and food to the flood-afflicted areas, and his social service work was absolutely perfect.<sup>15</sup> In 1913, Jatindranath Mukherjee also rendered excellent service in relieving the distress of the people of North Bengal which was devastated by flood.<sup>16</sup>

At that time no voluntary association for the cremation of the dead existed. The members of the Anushilan Samiti voluntarily cremated the dead bodies of the poor and the destitute. In this respect, the motto followed by the members was, 'Love all, hate none'. The preachings of the *Gita* regarding selfless work and self-sacrifice were followed by the members of the Samiti.<sup>17</sup>

Jibantara Halidar also stated that they set up the working Men's Institution to teach the sons of the labourers, coolies and masons.<sup>18</sup> This

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12. Budhadeva Bhattacharaya (ed.) *Freedom Struggle and the Anushilan Samiti*, Vol. I, Essay entitled "From cultural to militant nationalism" by Niharanjan Ray, (Calcutta, 1979) p. 27.
  13. Home Political Confidential, A February, 1917 no. 428-433, History Sheet of Jiban Lal Chatterji alias Suresh Chandra Rai, National Archives, New Delhi.
  14. Home Political Confidential, A. September, 1918, No. 185-189, K.W., History Sheet of Dhirendra Ghatak, National Archives, New Delhi.
  15. Motilal Roy, *Amar Dekha Biplab O Biplabi*, p. 113.
  16. B.B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, p. 166.
  17. Jibantara Halidar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24.
  18. Oral Interview taken of Jibantara Halidar, *Op. Cit.*



fact indicates that the members of the Anushilan Samiti voluntarily imparted free education to the children of the poorer class.

Attending the sick and nursing patients afflicted with epidemic disease like cholera was a part of the duties of the members of the revolutionary *samities* of Bengal. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Barisal (formed on 6th August, 1905) had a separate department for rendering free medical aid to the people.<sup>19</sup> The welfare activities of this Samiti included the improvement of the sanitation of the village, inculcating good morals and good tastes and prohibition of intoxicants.<sup>20</sup> The *Samities* of Bengal regularly despatched their members to fairs and festivals for helping the people. Their services during the Ardhodaya Yoga and Baruni bathing festivals in Dacca and Mymensingh were well appreciated by the contemporary and local authorities. A lot of rural uplift work was done by the Samities. Tanks were cleared of weeds, village roads were constructed and the members of the Samities helped the poor build their houses by offering free manual labour.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti propagated the idea of social revolution. Its main object was self-dependence, to develop as far as possible a self-reliant society. Removal of social problems of the people of the district was one of the important items in its program. To attain its object, the Samiti took up items of work, such as reduction of litigation by introducing arbitration, temperance, women's education, abolition of dowry, making provision for drinking water in the rural areas and removal of the disabilities of the lower caste Hindus. This Samiti had 159 branches working all over the district, and it had also a number of paid workers. When there was a famine in Barisal, the Samiti collected a sum of Rs,65,000/- to help the famine-stricken people. The famine provided an occasion to the Samiti for working among the masses, mostly Muslims. Though Aswini Kumar Dutta was the founder-president of this Samiti, the main organising hands were those of Professor Satish Chatterjee, and subsequently of a young teacher named Satish Chandra Mukherjee. They were respectively Secretary

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19. Freedom Papers, An Account of Samities in Bengal (1900-08), non-conf., West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

20. Non-Confidential Records on Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Barisal (1905-09), West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

21. Freedom Papers, An Account of Samities in Bengal (1900-08), *Op. Cit.*

and Assistant Secretary of the Samiti. In the face of government repression all over the district, the Samiti undertook the task of upholding the morale of the people.<sup>22</sup> The year 1906 was one of scarcity, and near-famine conditions prevailed in some of the districts of East Bengal such as Mymensingh. The Suhrid Samiti and the Sadhana Samiti organised batches of volunteers and collected money for relief work throughout the district.<sup>23</sup>

During the period of disruption and virtual public demoralisation under the British rule, two trends were in operation. Aurobindo as well as the other leaders of the revolutionary movement emphasized on two aspects of their movement. One was in the line of constructive social work aimed at building up a self-reliant society. This idea was preached in Bengal through different media by several leaders including Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Sister Nivedita, Satish Mukherjee (of the Dawn Society) and B.C. Pal. Pal preached this idea through his own weekly journal, the *New India*. But only Aswini Kumar Dutta tried to give it a practical shape in Barisal. For this reason the government reports mentioned Barisal as the “most advanced” district of the province.<sup>24</sup> The other aspect was going round the villages and starting rural libraries and nursing societies by organising Seva Samities for nursing the sick and for rendering help to the distressed and indigent people. The latter group gradually drifted from the main current of revolutionary activities, maintaining, of course, sympathy for and also some contact with that work.<sup>25</sup>

On the cultural side, the study of philosophy, history and poetry was also encouraged by the *samities*. Books of Thomas Paine, Thoreau Tolstoi, and the sermons and preachings of Theodore Parker were read and discussed by the revolutionaries. The works of Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist leader, was popular with them, but Marx was almost unknown at that time.<sup>26</sup> It was only after the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917, that some of the Bengal Revolutionaries began to

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22. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 221-222.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

24. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 229.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 93.



study seriously the Marxian doctrines as is evident from the memoirs of some revolutionary leaders as well as from the interviews taken of them.<sup>27</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries were vociferous in their opposition to the social evils and abuses of the day. Bepin Chandra Pal, from his very youth, protested against such evils under the banner of the Brahma Samaj, and in this process, even courted poverty and separation from his own kith and kin. He ceased to believe in caste at the tender age of 14, and demonstrated the sincerity of his belief later by marrying a widow of a higher caste twice in his life. Further, by lending his powerful support to the Age of Consent Bill (1891), he completely alienated the social conservatives and even ran the risk of assassination.<sup>28</sup> It should be noticed, however, that Pal wanted relaxation of caste restrictions and not total abolition of the various castes.<sup>29</sup> In Pal's view, the caste system was merely a law enunciated by the Aryans in order to bring the different races and cultures of India within their own fold.<sup>30</sup> According to Aurobindo, the caste was originally an arrangement for the distribution of functions in society just as the class system in Europe, but the principle on which the distribution was based in India was peculiar to this country. This division of caste in India was conceived as distribution of duties and a man's caste depended on his *dharma* or religion, his spiritual, moral and practical duties. His *dharma* depended on his *syabhava*, i.e. his temperament and inborn nature. It was more humane than the European class system, based on the cash nexus. But he remarked that in the present age, the institution of caste had degenerated, and was determined not by spiritual qualifications which had become a secondary consideration and sometimes even totally immaterial, but by the purely material grounds of occupation and birth. As a result, many perversions such as caste arrogance, feeling of

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27. Oral Interview taken of Sri Ganesh Ghosh at his residence in Calcutta on 4.11.1982. Oral interview taken of Sri Sunil Das at his residence in Calcutta on 2.2.1984, Oral Interview taken of Smt. Bina Bhowmik at her residence in Calcutta on 2.7.1983.

Dr. B.S. Sharma, *A Political Philosophy of M.N. Roy*, (Delhi, 1965), pp. 2, 11.

28. S.P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, (Calcutta, 1974) Vol. III, p. 287.

29. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

30. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75, f.n. B.C. Pal, *The Soul of India*, pp. 108-112.



superiority and exclusiveness had come to dominate it.<sup>31</sup> In Aurobindo's view, the caste system was the framework of "a communal self-determined freedom", and a "training ground for the education of the human mind and the soul and its development through the natural to the spiritual existence". Here we find an echo of the views of Swami Vivekananda who wrote, "the original idea of *jati* was the freedom of the individual to express his nature, his *prakriti*, his caste..."<sup>32</sup> Thus Aurobindo opined that there was essentially no inequality between the devout Brahmin and the devout Sudra in the single *Virat Purusha*, of which each caste was a necessary and integral part. He decried the Baniya or the bourgeois spirit of the British rule, and invoked the spirit of the Brahmin in India.<sup>33</sup>

Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, in his book entitled *In Search of Freedom*, wrote "Our brotherhood in the Anushilan Samiti not only made us staunch nationalists but also advocates for the removal of social inequalities on the basis of caste. We have recruited from all classes and castes amongst the Hindus who were very orthodox. We were brothers-at-arms, a part and parcel of a semi-military organization in which every one was ready to sacrifice himself before the altar of freedom. In such a brotherhood there was no question of differentiation and untouchability..."<sup>34</sup> But he disclosed the fact that some members of the Samiti like Girin Banerjee, though well read, were extremely conservative in their ideas. Banerjee was a great supporter of the caste system, and even in jail he would not accept food cooked by a non-Brahmin. Among others who were likewise conservative in their outlook, mention may be made of Purna Das, Suresh Das and Mani Choudhury. On the other hand, Pratul Ganguli, Bhupendra Nath Dutta and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee were regarded as liberals. The liberals were described as free lovers by the conservatives, while the liberals branded the conservatives as *achalayatan* or immobile. But such conservative attitude was an exception rather than the rule among the revolutionaries of Bengal.<sup>35</sup>

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31. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram : Early Political Writings*, Pondicherry, 1973, article entitled, *Caste and Democracy*, pp. 536, 538.
  32. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 76, f.n. Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram* weekly, Dec. 1907, Letter from Aurobindo to Mrinalini Devi, 30th August, 1905.
  34. J.C. Chatterjee, *In Search of Freedom*, p. 57.
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

B.C.Pal, the great extremist leader, also vehemently fought against the social evils of child marriage and enforced widowhood which were two offshoots of the traditional caste system. He looked upon the social problems from the standpoint of rights and justice. Associated with these evils was the vice of polygamy which drew Pal's attention. In a meeting (1921) held in connection with women's franchise, he observed that every section of the society, irrespective of sex or wealth, had a right to that education which helped to develop human qualities and it was for the successful realisation of these human qualities that women must be endowed with all the rights that a political system offered.<sup>36</sup> C.H. Heimsath has rightly observed, "Pal's sensitivity to the intellectual and social currents of his day, was unmatched among the Bengalis writing in English and throughout Pal's prolific outpouring of prose, the urgent need for a rebirth of India's social life was always an important theme."<sup>37</sup>

We find from the government reports that repeated references were made to social reforms in the proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. At least on two occasions it was stated that without social reforms or social revolution, political independence was impossible. The principal items of social reforms advocated, according to the government report, were abolition of the caste system or at least the removal of the disabilities of the Namasudras and other lower castes. The Namasudras were considered to be a fighting class among the Bengalees, but they were not allowed to avail themselves of the services of priests, washermen and barbers who served the high caste people. The Samiti advocated that the disabilities of the Namasudras should be removed. Landlords including Upendra Sen, who was the Vice-President of the Samiti, advocated the right of the Namasudras to enjoy the services of washermen and barbers. Sen advocated that the caste system should be abolished and said that there could be no political reform without social reform. Other items of social reforms advocated were re-marriage of Hindu widows, abolition of child marriage, acceptance of dowry in marriage and enforcement of temperance by picketing before liquor shops. In 1905 and 1906 almost all the districts

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36. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 44.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33, f.n. C.H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, (Bombay), p. 267.



of the two separated parts of Bengal had associations or *samities* which had some stocks of books and made the beginning of a rural library movement. These *samities* also tried to advance the cause of communal harmony by inculcating the idea of national service among their members. They preached the cult of self-immolation or voluntary suffering among the youngmen.<sup>38</sup>

In the first decade of the present century Satish Chandra Mukherjee played an important role in the intellectual regeneration of the Bengali youth. Apart from the *Dawn Magazine*, the Dawn Society (1902-06) was also a very powerful instrument for his socio-cultural campaign. One of the most important services rendered by Mukherjee to the country was the propagation of India's moral and spiritual values side by side with her urge for scientific and technical advancement. Educated Indians were thus made conscious of their worth, dignity and manhood in spite of political and economic enslavement. Mukherjee strove his best to restore to the nation the self-confidence which it had lost.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, it may be pointed out that Aurobindo himself sometimes talked of socialism. He affirmed that socialism was not a European concept, but essentially an Asiatic and especially Indian one, and believed that social democracy was the only true democracy. He further said that the duty of a citizen was strictly speaking a socialistic duty,-- freedom being the end of both patriotism and socialism. The all round well-being of a man was the aim of both. According to him, socialism should free human society from the tyranny of wealth, and should aim at bringing about such social conditions as would ensure equal comforts and amenities of life for all the members of society.<sup>40</sup>

A criticism sometimes levelled against Aurobindo and other radical leaders was that they neglected the important issue of social reform.<sup>41</sup> Bhupendra Nath Dutta also pointed out that the revolutionary leadership was silent on the question of removing social and

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38. A.C. Guha, *Qp. Cit.*, pp. 222-223.

39. Haridas Mukherjee, *Satish Mukherjee, A Father of The Bengali Revolution*, (Calcutta, 1948), pp. 3-4, 6-7.

40. Kishore Gandhi (ed.), *Contemporary Relevance of Sri Aurobindo*, (Delhi, 1973), essay entitled 'Sri Aurobindo's Vision of Free India by G.S. Pathak, pp. 2-3.

41. Karan Singh, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, 1970), p. 173.



economic inequality, redistribution of social wealth and improving the condition of the poorer classes in society. The nationalists did not bother much about social reforms, because they came to believe that social reforms would come by themselves after the attainment of freedom.<sup>42</sup>

The Revolutionaries did not lay great emphasis upon social reform and economic change not because they considered these unimportant. They were convinced that political independence must be achieved before a really effective scheme of social reform could be attempted with any hope of success. Social reform, in their opinion, could not precede political independence. To attempt any social reform before becoming independent would fritter away the energies of the people which ought to be wholly directed to the achievement of national liberation. It was this attitude and not any aversion to social reform *per se* that led Aurobindo to attack the Moderate leadership for their obsession with social problems.<sup>43</sup>

## II

### **Economic Ideas of the Bengal Revolutionaries**

In the economic sphere the Bengal revolutionaries preached the ideas of *swadeshi* (national industry) and boycott which they considered essential for the purpose of achieving *Purna Swaraj* or complete freedom for India.

Though the common belief is that the revolutionary secret societies sprang up in Bengal as a result of the Swadeshi movement, it is a wrong idea. The revolutionary movement was not born out of lamentation for the partition of Bengal. Rather the Bengal Revolutionaries took advantage of the outbreak of the Swadeshi Movement to advance their political object, and in their process they came to direct and patronise the Swadeshi movement in Bengal.<sup>44</sup>

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42. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, (Calcutta, 1983), p. 15 (in Bengali).

43. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

44. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 12-13.

The Dawn Society (1902-06) established by Satish Chandra Mukherjee and the *Dawn*, a journal founded by him in 1897 became the two most important organs for the propagation of *Swadeshi* and boycott in regard to foreign goods, especially British goods, and the establishment of indigenous industries. The workers of this society carried the gospel of *swadeshi* to the remotest districts of Bengal, and became the leaders of the movement, inspiring many educationists, lawyers and doctors to join it.<sup>45</sup> The *Dawn Magazine* was a pioneer in initiating discussions on and researches into economic topics and values. Satish Mukherjee inspired his pupils and guided them quite ably in that direction. He published their writings in the *Dawn*. Well written articles on trade, industry, banking, agriculture and population always found a prominent position in this journal. He himself also functioned as one of the chief promoters of economic researches during the first decade of the 20th century, so far as Bengal was concerned.<sup>46</sup> The *Dawn Magazine* wrote, in its issue of May, 1906, "The Bengal Swadeshi movement, supported by the spirit of boycott which, represented the spirit of national self-assertion amongst us when national self-respect was sought to be trodden under foot by the actions of an alien bureaucracy, naturally began as a movement to train the tastes of the people and to foster the feelings in favour of home made articles. The Swadeshi movement is thus a movement which is patriotic in the first instance and only economic or industrial in the second. The Swadeshi movement is not an industrial movement in its essence, but is essentially a moral movement in the larger sense of the word, concerning itself with rousing the moral sense of a whole people in its relations with a bureaucratic power." The cry was to reject foreign goods and to start the use of home-made products. So the question of increased consumption and not of increased supply came to take a prior place in the consideration of the people.<sup>47</sup>

Another contribution of the Dawn Society was the systematic arrangement for commercial or vocational training of the boys.<sup>48</sup> To promote this spirit a *swadeshi* store was opened in 1903 in Calcutta with

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45. Haridas Mukherjee, *Satish Mukherjee, A Father Of The Bengali Revolution*, p. 31.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

47. *The Dawn Magazine*, microfilmed, Reel 1, May, 1906, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

48. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 10-11.



the object of promoting a genuine interest of the students in the indigenous industries of India. It was managed wholly by the young members of the Dawn Society where home-made articles of various kinds were collected by the boys themselves and sold by them daily in the afternoon.<sup>49</sup> The boys were also taught to study the market rates, rise and fall of prices, and other relevant facts. The constant endeavour of Satish Mukherjee was to make the boys business experts under such practical discipline.<sup>50</sup> Besides, by promoting the sale of indigenous goods, by popularising the home-made products in a variety of ways i.e. lectures and exhibitions, and by inspiring a large group of active workers with the *swadeshi* or nationalist spirit, the Dawn Society gave a very powerful impetus to the movement for the industrial regeneration of the country,<sup>51</sup> and thereby helped the movement for the boycott of foreign goods. This latter item became an integral part of the Bengal Revolution (1905-'06) from 7th August, 1905. But Satish Mukherjee started the same, though on a limited scale, at least one year and six months before (1903-'04). In this sense he may be regarded as a pioneer of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the ideologies of the Swadeshi movement were laid substantially on the ideas and activities of the Dawn Society. It created a *swadeshi* temper among the people of Bengal, and paved the way, to a large extent, for the advent of the Swadeshi movement.<sup>53</sup>

Probably the first open call in writing for boycott of British goods came in the wake of the announcement of the partition scheme from Krishna Kumar Mitra who, in an editorial published in his weekly paper, the *Sanjivani*, on July 13, 1905, called upon his countrymen to reject foreign goods as completely as possible under the circumstances. In *India's Fight For Freedom* the author writes, "From the I.B. Records of the West Bengal government, (L. No. 476/193) we learn that the idea of boycott of British goods for the redress of political or economic grievances of the people had been growing in Bengal ever since the last quarter of the 19th century and that immediately before the formal

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49. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 74.

50. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

51. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 75.

52. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

53. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 75.



beginning of the Boycott-Swadeshi movement, it was Tahal Ram Ganga Ram who, early in 1905, vigorously preached the idea of boycott in the course of his speeches at Calcutta." In the historic meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall on August 7, 1905, which was the biggest protest meeting held so far in the annals of British rule, five resolutions were passed, the third of which became famous as the boycott resolution. Its effect was revolutionary and it laid the basis of the great boycott agitation that subsequently ensued. It is significant to note that though boycott was envisaged as a temporary measure for the removal of a specific grievance, its tremendous potentiality for damaging the economic interests of the British and for awakening mass consciousness among the Indians were quickly grasped by astute minds.<sup>54</sup>

The Bengal Revolutionaries felt that India was being economically exploited by Britain, and that the latter had built her industry and economy on the ruins of India's economic prosperity. They most ardently took up the cause of the Indian peasants and village craftsmen,<sup>55</sup> and began to preach vigorously the twin ideas of boycott and *swadeshi*, boycott of British goods being the negative aspect of their programme, and *swadeshi* or the use of home-made goods being its positive aspect.

According to Bepin Chandra Pal, "without a sound economic basis there can be no moral and intellectual uplift." With this end in view he prescribed self-help and self-sacrifice.<sup>56</sup> What he preached was the method of passive resistance to the British Government in order to foster an absolute mental aloofness from the alien government. For achieving this end two things were absolutely necessary. One was the creation of a strong sense of aversion in public mind to all official connection, and the other was to open new ways and means in India's own industrial, commercial, educational and social life which would enable the Indians to become self-sufficient in their own lives. This second aspect implied a concerted action to increase India's indigenous production.<sup>57</sup> Thus, in essence, what Pal preached was the ideas of

54. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 120-122.

55. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 91-92.

56. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60, f.n. B.C. Pal, "self help, Self Reliance", *New India*, Vol. I, No. 17, Dec. 16, 1901, p. 269.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 64, f.n. Pal, "Love, Logic & Politics", in the *Bande Mataram*, October 6, 1906.

boycott and *swadeshi*. He expected a boycotter to be guided by the highest social and moral obligations; his supreme concern should always be to protect or advance social well-being. Pal himself set an example by refusing to give evidence or to take oath in the British court of law in the *Bande Mataram* prosecution case (1907). The *Sandhya*, a Bengali daily of the time, called Pal "a genuine priest of the boycott."<sup>58</sup>

Pal also wanted the Government to adopt a policy of *laissez faire* which would help the people in their *swadeshi* enterprises in both economic and educational fields. By *laissez faire* he meant that the collective indigenous potentialities of the nation should be allowed to grow uninterrupted by the government, so that a self-sufficient economic structure of the society might be established. What Pal presupposed was a policy which would restrict governmental activities to the protection of law and order in the country, and allow the people to develop and organise their own forces within the limits of the law and without infringing the primary rights of the government. To him, the problem before the Indians was a pre-eminently psychological problem. People looked up to the government for every thing that they wanted. There was no initiative, no self-confidence and no national consciousness in them. The problem was to change this soul-killing mentality. "Our new nationalism proclaimed therefore the gospel of absolute self-reliance and self-help."<sup>59</sup>

Sister Nivedita, another great inspirer of the Swadeshi movement, was aware of the fact that national life must be built upon the solid foundation of economic prosperity. She whole-heartedly supported the Swadeshi movement. With a view to encouraging the young patriots, she reminded them that it was the best way to get themselves respected by the whole world. What she implied was that the united action of the people of India would adversely affect the British industries and thereby compel the British government to come to terms with them.<sup>60</sup>

Aurobindo, in an unpublished essay on 'The Morality of Boycott', which was produced during the trial on behalf of the prosecution in the

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58. *Ibid.*, p. 65, f.n. Report on Native Papers in Bengal, August 31st, 1907, conf. No. 35 of 1907 p. 873.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67, f.n. Pal's speech at Edinburgh, *The Times*, London, February 15, 1909, f.n. "Congress, Swarajist Politics" in *The Englishman*, December 30, 1926.

60. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 49.



Alipur Bomb case, wrote that he considered boycott as a measure of economic warfare against Great Britain.<sup>61</sup> In Aurobindo's writings we find not only an incisive theoretical analysis of the importance of boycott, but also valuable hints regarding its proper technique. He expressed the idea of economic boycott in the following words, "we refuse to help the process of exploitation and impoverishment in our capacity as consumers, we refuse henceforth to purchase foreign and especially the British goods or to condone their purchase by others. By an organised and relentless boycott of British goods, we propose to render the further exploitation of the country impossible."<sup>62</sup> The theory was thus based on two major assumptions. The first was that the essence of British rule in India lay in its economic exploitation of the country. The 'nation of shop-keepers' found in India an ideal storehouse of cheap furnished goods and they exploited the situation with ruthless efficiency. The second assumption was that if a determined, patriotic effort was made by the Indians, they could voluntarily abstain from the purchase and use of British-made goods, and if this could be done in a sustained manner on a large scale, it would strike a deadly blow at the root of the British power in India. Aurobindo saw in the boycott movement a potent weapon whereby it might be possible for India to shake off the British rule without a bloody revolution. He wrote, "We must always remember in this connection that alien absolutism in this country depends helplessly on the cooperation of our people. Let that cooperation be withdrawn and bureaucratic absolutism tumbles in like a house of cards."<sup>63</sup> In the *Bande Mataram* weekly magazine of 9th August 1908, Aurobindo also discussed about the two aspects of boycott. Politically, it meant an act of retaliation, and economically it meant a preference for goods produced in one's own country to those imported from foreign countries.<sup>64</sup> In the *Karmayogin* of 8th January, 1910, Aurobindo further opined that the ideal of boycott meant independence in industry and commerce. Boycott was essentially a form of voluntary protection towards the creation of new industries which served two ends - to prevent the infant industry from being

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61. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

62. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 122 f.n. Doctrine of Passive Resistance, pp. 36-37.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

64. *Bande Mataram* (Weekly), 9th August, 1908, article 'Retaliatory Boycott', Micro-filmed, J.Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.



strangled in its weak and unestablished state by full grown and powerful competitors and to give a stimulus to it by assuring a market. So the first condition of a successful boycott was the organisation of national industry with a view, first, to the improvement and extension of that which existed, and secondly to the opening of new lines of enterprise. The second condition of a successful boycott was the organisation of a genuine and sufficient supply for it was not possible for every one to hunt swadeshi articles to their source and purchase them. So there must be a supplying agency which would make the goods available in the near and convenient market, as far as possible to the doors of the people. A clear division must be made here between the articles of necessity and those of luxury, and to renounce the latter unless they were of indigenous manufacture. But there were limits to such boycott which could not be avoided, for a considerable number of foreign articles had to be purchased even for home consumption, still more for work and business.<sup>65</sup>

Aurobindo laid great emphasis on the fact that boycott and swadeshi were inextricably correlated. He wrote in 'An open letter to my countrymen', that boycott of foreign goods was a necessary condition for the encouragement of *swadeshi* industries. The idea of economic self-sufficiency was an essential counterpart to the theory of boycott. Swadeshi, therefore, implied the manufacture in one's own country of all goods that the people required.<sup>66</sup>

In fact the Boycott-Swadeshi movement did lead to a remarkable spurt in indigenous industry, especially in such fields as textiles, where bonfires of Manchester and Lancashire cloth became a common sight throughout the country, particularly in Bengal and Maharashtra.<sup>67</sup>

But it should be noted here that Aurobindo, like Tilak, was in favour of an effective boycott of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles. So he recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany, Austria and America, so that the fullest pressure might be exerted upon England.

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65. The *Karmayogin*, 8th January, 1910, microfilmed, Jawahar Lal Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

66. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 124-125.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Both Aurobindo and Tilak wanted the boycott to be a political weapon. Aurobindo realised that the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea. What they stood for was national self-sufficiency in Key industries, the production of necessities of life and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means but complete self-sufficiency did not seem practicable or even desirable, since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption, and for that she must import and maintain an international exchange.<sup>68</sup>

Aurobindo was fully aware of the importance of a no-tax campaign, for he wrote. "The payment of taxes is the most direct assistance given by the community to the administration.. To refuse payment is at once the most emphatic protest possible short of taking up arms... The refusal to pay taxes is a natural and logical result of the attitude of passive resistance."<sup>69</sup> But, at the same time, he realized that a no-tax campaign demanded a perfect organisation and an ultimate preparedness from which the Indians were yet far off.<sup>70</sup> He did not include non-payment of taxes as one of the immediate policies of the Nationalist Party, because as he put it, "an ultimatum should never be presented unless one is prepared to follow it up to its last consequences."<sup>71</sup>

As regards *swadeshi*, Aurobindo called upon his countrymen to take certain constructive steps towards economic development. Since the vast majority of educated Indians were absorbed in governmental or quasi-governmental services, the only way to remove the gross anomaly was to create rival sources of employment which would provide the Indians with an independent living. This could be done only by promoting the industrial development of the country which would open up new and attractive avenues of employment. For this purpose Indians must also be sent abroad to learn scientific methods of production.<sup>72</sup> Aurobindo also observed that Indians must take up agriculture

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68. A.B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, (Pondicherry, 1958), p. 229.

69. K. Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 135.

70. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram : Early Political Writings*, (Pondicherry, 1973), p. 121.

71. K. Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 135.

72. Sri Aurobindo, *Op. Cit.*, November 2, 1907 article, 'How to meet inevitable repression', pp. 581-582.



in right earnest, which they had so long neglected. He wrote "The return to the land is as essential to our salvation as the development of *swadeshi* or the fight against famine. If we train our youngmen to go back to the fields...they will be able to become mentors, leaders and examples to the village population, and by introducing better methods of agriculture and habits of thrift and foresight, and securing an equal position for the peasant in his dealings with the merchant and the money-lender, they will materially assist the *swadeshi* manufacture".<sup>73</sup>

It is interesting to note that even as early as 1906-'07, in one of the meetings of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Suren Sen referred to Marx's *Das Kapital*, and adducing some arguments from the book, stated that boycott of British goods was justified and legal from the political point of view. He described boycott as a fencing for the protection of India's indigenous industries and the cult of *swadeshi*. Swadeshi was the end, and boycott was the means.<sup>74</sup> Ashwini Kumar Ganguly, a revolutionary, stated in an interview that as members of the Anushilan Samiti, they had to earn their own living by working as porters and hawkers.<sup>75</sup> This shows that the members of the Anushilan Samiti were trained to become self-sufficient. Some members of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti started the Bengal Youngmen's Zamindari Co-operative Society on the advice of Justice Sarada Charan Mitra of the Calcutta High Court. The idea was to place young revolutionaries in the rural or agricultural sector, and make them work on a cooperative line. Organising small-scale industries and *swadeshi* stores also engaged the attention of some of these workers. In the training and discipline programme of the Anushilan Samiti, a number of books were studied to provide economic urge to the workers of the Samiti, such as Digby's *Prosperous British India*, Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty And Un-British Rule In India*, Ramesh Dutt's *Economic History of India* (in 2 Vols.) and Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar's *Deshar Katha* (in Bengali).<sup>76</sup>

In order to encourage the use of indigenous goods, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Barisal laid down in its scheme of village association

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73. *Bande Mataram* (weekly), 8th March, 1908, Microfilmed, J. Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.

74. A. C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 222.

75. Oral Interview taken of Sri Ashwini Kumar Ganguly at his residence in Calcutta on 19.4.1983.

76. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 161, 92.



that "the association will make arrangement to the best of its power so that the *swadeshi* articles may be available at a cheap price." In its second and third annual proceedings the same Samiti specifically laid down that "the object of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti is to remove the wretched financial condition of Barisal and to teach it self-help". The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti also took up seriously a socio-economic programme with the object of saving people the cost of litigation and teach them the value of mutual cooperation and self-help by taking up arbitration or *salish* as a part of their programme.<sup>77</sup> The workers of this Samiti also used to sell indigenous salt known as *karkach*. The Samiti started an oil mill at Nalchiti, and set up a number of handlooms in different villages. But the most important work of the Samiti in this respect was the establishment of the Co-operative Navigation Company whose vessels were expected to ply between Calcutta, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal, Narayangunj and Serajgunj with headquarters at Barisal. But, due to the unfair means adopted by the British Joint Steamer Company to beat this indigenous enterprise, the *swadeshi* company had to close down before it could have a real start.<sup>78</sup>

The Samities of Bengal started new industries for weaving cloth, preparing thread, linen, frocks, socks, buttons, handles, finger-rings, knives, scissors, etc. The Samities gave encouragement to potters, blacksmiths and mat-makers to improve their respective business, helped handloom industry, encouraged cultivation of cotton and taught practical agriculture. The Surhid Samiti of Mymensingh started an agricultural farm at Dulania, Sylhet, with the object of "teaching the arts of agriculture to *bhadralok* youths." The land was leased out by Brojendra Kishore Roy Choudhuri, Zamindar of Gouripur, Mymensingh.<sup>79</sup> One of the aims of this Samiti was the use and circulation of countrymade goods. The members of the Surhid Samiti founded a shop of *swadeshi* goods called the Surhid Bhandar.<sup>80</sup>

Swadeshi textile mills, improved handlooms, steamship concerns, match and soap factories, potteries, and tanneries began to come into

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- 77. Freedom Papers, Non-Confidential, An Account of Samities in Bengal, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  - 78. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 225-226.
  - 79. Freedom Papers, An Account of Samities in Bengal. *Op. Cit.*
  - 80. Freedom Papers, Non-Confidential Samities and Associations of Mymensingh, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

existence. Between 1905-06 and 1910-11, two textile mills namely the Banga Laxmi Cotton Mill and the Mohini Mill were set up. Banking attracted some landlords and merchants, and the Bengal National Bank was started with an authorised capital of 50 lakhs. Rich zamindars set up a national fund for financing weaving schools. Acharya P.C. Roy developed the Bengal Chemical, Nilratan Sarkar financed the first chrome tannery and Rashbehari Ghosh, the Bande Mataram Match Factory. Swadeshi stores sold *swadeshi* goods in retail, and student-volunteers of the Anti-Circular Society and the National Volunteer Organisation, peddled them often from door to door.<sup>81</sup> According to Professor Sumit Sarkar, *swadeshi* industries were not economically viable, they got sustenance from the political agitation against the partition, and ultimately 'petered out'. But in a recent monograph Dr. Amit Bhattacharya has shown that there was a real revival, birth, and growth of hand-made and machine-made industries in Bengal during the first decade of the present century, and that the new bourgeoisie showed an enterprising spirit which was really commendable.<sup>81A</sup>

Some of the Bengal revolutionaries also showed concern about the working class or the proletariat. Though a strong critic of communist teachings and practice, B.C. Pal's concern for the common man's interests was too deep to be underrated. He was perhaps the first among the Indian nationalist leaders to ask the Congress, as early as 1901, to combine the forces of labour against the capitalists. During the *swadeshi* days also, he sought to mobilise the workers and labourers as the backbone of the nationalist movement. In all this, his approach was that of a democrat. He demanded a thorough reconstruction of our economic structure which would be able to provide good food in sufficient quantity for every man, woman and child in India. The instruments and methods of production were to be so constructed and regulated that they would provide every worker with ample leisure for the cultivation of the intellect. Pal's concern for the poor and the downtrodden led him to champion the cause of the Assam tea-garden labourers in the last quarter of the 19th century. In his book, *The New*

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81. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.

81A. Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement In Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 501-502, Amit Bhattacharya, *Swadeshi Enterprise In Bengal, 1900-1920* (Calcutta, 1986), pp. 273-277.



*Economic Menace of India*, he demanded higher wages and shorter hours of work for the Indian labourers.<sup>82</sup>

The economic reconstruction, that Pal sought, was to be achieved through peaceful and orderly means by infusing a spirit of cooperation and a sense of social solidarity. Thus what he prescribed seemed to be a mixed economy as practised in the modern welfare state.<sup>83</sup> Satish Chandra Mukherjee also believed in a mixed economy in which large capitalist organizations should be established only where absolutely indispensable (viz. railways, mines, chemicals), and small scale organisations would exist in all other sectors of the economy.<sup>83A</sup>

Aurobindo also felt the need of amelioration of the living and working conditions of the Indian proletariat. In the *Udbodhan* of Ashadh, 1348 B.S., Girija Shankar Roy Choudhury concluded that Aurobindo derived this idea from Marx. But this is not correct. Such ideas often come to great leaders of thought by intuition.<sup>84</sup> In the *Bande Mataram* (weekly) of 14th June, 1908, Aurobindo wrote that a healthy and vigorous national life was not possible without a sound economic basis and structure. But the economic resurrection of India would not be complete unless it delivered a message of salvation to the poverty-stricken populations of the whole world, by presenting a new social and economic arrangement which would enable to solve the problem of the conflict between capital and labour. Therefore to him, the Indian protest against the British exploitation of the economic resources of India had both a national and a universal aspect.<sup>85</sup> Though, in his 'New Lamps for Old', Aurobindo had spoken about the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and of the imminence of a revolution from below, and prophesied that violence would restore equality between the classes, we do not hear any more of this view in 1906-07. Perhaps the reason was that Aurobindo never made an attempt to establish a real contact with the proletariat, urban or rural. Many of

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82. A.P. Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 148, f.n. Pal, 'Indian Nationalism and Economic Reconstruction', *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 3, No. 2, August 22, 1922.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

83A. Amit Bhattacharya, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

84. A.B. Purani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 307.

85. *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Magazine, 14th June, 1908, article entitled, 'The Bed Rock of Indian Nationalism,' microfilmed, J. Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, N. Delhi.



the friends and patrons of the extremists were zamindars such as Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya Chaudhuri, (Mymensingh) and Brojendra Kishore Rai Chaudhuri (Gauripur), for they saw in the Partition a pretext for the revision of the Permanent Settlement. However, in his later life, Aurobindo became a yogi who found happiness in the renunciation of the desire for wealth. The contemporary Marxist reading of historical evolution from feudalism through capitalism to socialism and its insistence on capitalism as an inevitable stage in that evolution were rejected by him because he hated capitalism as it had developed.<sup>86</sup>

The economic thought of the Bengal revolutionaries was not original in the strict sense of the term. They expanded those ideas which had already been laid down by the moderate leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govinda Ranade and Romesh Chandra Dutta. They protested against the same economic maladies such as British exploitation of India's economic wealth, free trade which put an end to old traditional handicrafts, extravagant railways which catered to the cotton interest at the cost of the Indian tax-payer and excessive land revenue which crippled the peasantry and exposed them to poverty and recurrent famines. Though both the moderates and the extremists blamed the British rule for Indian poverty, the latter went a step further by attempting to oust the British from India before the national economic regeneration might properly begin. To both Pal and Aurobindo, boycott had double implications, i.e. economic and political, to drive away the British from India and to renounce the use of British-made goods and thereby to put economic pressure on the British Government. To Aurobindo, Swadeshism had a double aspect. "It was not the mere secularity of autonomy and wealth but a return to the faith in India's destiny as the world-saviour."<sup>87</sup>

The ideas of boycott and *swadeshi* were not new. Outside India, boycott had been preached in the U.S.A., Ireland and China long before 1905. The first rumblings of boycott in India, had been heard in 1881. The cult of *swadeshi* was first preached by Gopal Rao Deshmukh of Poona in 1849, and in Bengal, it had been preached by Rajnarayan

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86. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 115-116.

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

Basu, Nabagopal Mitra (as early as 1867) and some members of the Tagore family. The Hindu Mela, held in Calcutta every year, also tried to popularise the same cult, though it had no explicit political object. Bholanath Chandra wrote an article on *swadeshi* and boycott in the *Mukherjee's Magazine* between 1873 and 1876. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 8th December, 1881, demanded social ostracism of traders in foreign manufactures. J. Chaudhury was the pioneer of *swadeshi* in its industrial aspect, for, by his efforts an industrial exhibition was held in connection with the Calcutta Congress in 1901 which henceforth became an annual feature. In Maharashtra, the idea of *swadeshi* was developed by M.G. Ranade, G.V. Joshi and V. Phadke. The Bengal revolutionaries enlarged upon these ideas quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Boycott of British goods was not total. It was confined mainly to cloth, sugar, salt and enamel. Pal also did not want to extend it to railways, tramcars, English books or electric lamps.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, the efforts made by the Bengal revolutionaries in popularising the ideas of boycott and *swadeshi* through their writings and public propaganda work and in organising boycott and *swadeshi*, are praiseworthy. They developed the rudiments of the cult of boycott and *swadeshi*, and for the first time gave this cult an explicit political object to look forward to.

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88. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-112.

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**EDUCATIONAL IDEAS OF THE  
BENGAL REVOLUTIONARIES**



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Ideas of *swaraj*, *swadeshi* and boycott did not comprise the entire ideology of the Bengal Revolutionaries. They also cherished ideas of national education or education on national lines and under national control, at least during the initial stages of the Swadeshi movement. The movement of national education as manifest in the first decade of the present century was essentially an expression of Bengal's militant nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

The Dawn Society, established in July, 1902, by Satish Chandra Mukherjee as a reaction against the Report of the Indian Universities' Commission, proved to be the harbinger of the National Council of Education. It became a powerful organ of resurgent Indian nationalism for the Society was intended to remedy the defects and deficiencies of the existing system of university education, and to be an institution for the cultivation of patriotic and nationalistic sentiments.<sup>2</sup> The Dawn Society was conceived by Satish Mukherjee as an instrument of a moral and intellectual revolution among the youth of Bengal in order to prepare them ultimately for the impending political revolution to achieve the country's freedom. The youngmen trained in this Society became the pioneers of the national education movement.<sup>3</sup>

*The Dawn Magazine*, founded in 1897 by Satish Mukherjee, in collaboration with Raj Kumar Banerjee, a lecturer in Physics in

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1. Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, *The Origins Of The National Education Movement*, (Calcutta, 1957), p. 3.
  2. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
  3. *Ibid.*, f. n. Forword by Radha Kumud Mukherjee, p. 1.

Bangabasi College (Calcutta) and Manmatha Nath Pal, a pleader in the Alipur Judges' Court, offered valuable service to the cause of national education. Though, originally an organ of the Bhagavat Chatuspathi, it became later an organ of the Dawn Society, and still later, an organ of the Swadeshi movement itself, particularly in its educational aspect. It was a monthly magazine intended to be a vehicle of the higher Eastern and Western culture. Its object was "to make a special study of Hindu life, thought and faith in the spirit of appreciation, while remaining fully alive to the usefulness and necessity of the existence of all other systems, secular or religious, Eastern or Western". The spirit of the journal was thus cosmopolitan and all-embracing.<sup>4</sup> In its first phase the *Dawn* propagated moral and spiritual ideals and values among other things, and contained articles on science, history, sociology and education. The educated classes were made conscious of their worth, dignity and manhood. In its second phase, as a bi-monthly magazine issued since September, 1904, the journal propagated the view that to love the country one must have full knowledge about it, and introduced new features, like 'Indiana', 'Topics for Discussion', 'Students' Section' etc. The 'Indiana' portion was devoted to articles on things pertaining to India,--its provinces, peoples, princes and so on.<sup>5</sup> Readers of this magazine were therefore taught to study India, both rural as well as urban, on the strength of census reports and by correspondence with students in different parts of the country.<sup>6</sup> It also became a mouthpiece of Resurgent Bengal in its economic and cultural aspects. After July, 1906, the patriotic and national character of the magazine became more prominent. But, above all, during 1906-08 the *Dawn* openly and directly propagated ideas and schemes of national education under national control.<sup>7</sup>

About 1892, Satish Mukherjee who was the Headmaster of a school at Berhampur in the Murshidabad district (of Bengal) came under the influence of the well-known preacher and saint Bijay Krishna Goswami, and in that atmosphere he became closely acquainted with

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4. Haridas Mukherjee, *Satish Mukherjee And The Dawn Magazine*, (Calcutta, 1953), p. 1.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

6. Haridas Mukherjee, *Satish Mukherjee, A Father Of The Bengali Revolution*, (Calcutta, 1948), p. 28.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.



Bepin Chandra Pal, Aswini Kumar Datta, Monoranjan Guha Thakurta and Dr. Sundari Mohan Das. All these *gurubhais* or co-disciples were subsequently associated with the extremist or radical wing of Bengali political life. Mukherjee's ideologies were fundamentally akin to those of Ramakrishana's standard-bearers.<sup>8</sup>

The Dawn Society undertook three types of work, namely moral education, vocational training and national education. The main aim of Satish Mukherjee's creative idealism was the remaking of individuals through education. The Dawn Society soon became an association of patriotic youngmen and students, representing different regions of Bengal as well as provinces outside Bengal. Among these pupils were Haran Chandra Chakladar (anthropologist), Radha Kumud Mukherjee (historian), Binoy Sarkar (economist), Rajendra Prasad (political leader), Profulla Kumar Sarkar (journalist) and Rabindra Narayan Ghose (educationist and Principal of the Ripon College), whose pupils of the Swadeshi days became aflame with patriotic spirit. The study circle of the Society met regularly at the premises of the present-day Vidyasagar College. Two days in a week were fixed for the general and moral training of the members, and the medium of instruction was English. On the moral training day, however, Pandit Nilakanta Goswami delivered sermons in Bengali from the *Gita*. Thus moral and spiritual training became a basic item of the education imparted by the Dawn Society. Another contribution was the systematic arrangement for commercial or vocational training of the boys for which purpose a Swadeshi Store which sold only indigenous articles was opened in 1903 in Calcutta.<sup>9</sup>

But the most important contribution of the Dawn Society was the inauguration of the National Education movement (August-September, 1905). In this sphere he not merely challenged the Government-controlled educational system, represented by the Calcutta University, but also strove systematically to sublimate that challenge into a creative movement. In this he enlisted the support of many other distinguished Bengali leaders like Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behary Ghosh, Gurudas Banerjee, Tarak Nath Palit, Ashutosh Choudhury, Byomkesh

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8. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 23-25.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.

Chakravarty, Abdul Rasul, Pramatha Nath Mitra, Chittaranjan Das, Heramba Maitra, Brojendra Nath Seal, Girish Chandra Bose, Ramendra Sunder Trivedi, Drs. Nilratan Sarkar, Pran Krishna Acharya and Radha Govinda Kar, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Bepin Chandra Pal, Motilal Ghosh, Hirendra Nath Datta, Brojendra Kishore Roychoudhury, Devaprasad Sarvadhikari, Subodh Chandra Mullick and Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee. Persons like Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, Sister Nivedita, Dinesh Chandra Sen and Jagadish Chandra Bose were associated with Satish Mukherjee as the 'brain trust' of the Dawn Society. Satish Mukherjee himself lectured on general culture, social service and nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

The Dawn Society also promoted the *swadeshi* spirit in education. Under the auspices of the Dawn Society the most memorable protest meeting against the government's repressive measures against the students at Rangpur was held in Calcutta on 5th November, 1905. Satish Mukherjee exhorted the students to sever all connections with the officialized university and to boycott its examinations.<sup>11</sup> Some prominent members of the Dawn Society issued a manifesto, requesting the M.A. and P.R.S. candidates of the Calcutta University for that year to boycott their ensuing examinations.<sup>12</sup>

A conference was held on 16th November, 1905, under the chairmanship of Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee, which decided upon the establishment of a new organisation for the dissemination of education, - literary, scientific and technical--along national lines and under national control. A few months after this conference Satish Mukherjee, in co-operation with other leaders of the Bengali society, mentioned above, established the National Council of Education on 11th March, 1906, under the chairmanship of Rash Behary Ghose, and shortly after its inauguration the Dawn Society ceased to exist. The spirit of the Society did not die, but was embodied in the National Council of Education.<sup>13</sup>

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10. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

11. R.C. Majumdar, *History Of The Freedom Movement In India*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 75.

12. *The National Council of Education, Bengal, A History And Homage*, (Calcutta, 1956) article entitled 'The National Council of Education' by Haran Chandra Chakladar, p. 61.

13. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 13-14.



Satish Mukherjee, in collaboration with Brajendra Nath Seal, Gurudas Banerjee and others, drew up a curriculum, quite in keeping with his ideas of national education. Bengali was accepted as the medium of instruction, and the need for vocational and technical training in all stages of education from primary to collegiate, was emphasized. Another significant item of the curriculum was the systematic provision for the study of physical, natural or positive sciences along with liberal arts, culture and humanism. The most characteristic feature was the provision for researches into ancient Indian history, philosophy, economics, politics, arts, sciences as well as other aspects of culture. Equally noteworthy was the attempt to encourage the study of Hindi, Marathi, Pali, Persian and Sanskrit languages as tools for original historical research. French and German also were taught as aids to the study of modern science and philosophy as well as European methods in the study of Indian culture. Physical culture and moral or religious education were also taken care of. These items taken together constituted a revolutionary ideal, aiming at the total reconstruction of the entire educational system along national lines. From the beginning of the movement (August - September, 1905) to the middle of 1906, Satish Mukherjee functioned virtually as its determining force.<sup>14</sup>

While almost all the great national leaders of Bengal strongly felt in their heart of hearts the utter inadequacy of the prevailing system of English education, all were not, however, in favour of a total boycott of the Calcutta University<sup>15</sup>. A reaction soon set in against the comprehensive planning of the National Council of Education, which was dominated by Satish Mukherjee, assisted by Brajendra Nath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore and Gurudas Banerjee. The reaction was headed by Taraknath Palit, Nilratan Sarkar and Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi of Kasimbazar. Thus two distinct wings in the national education movement developed. On the very day (1st June, 1906) that the National Council of Education was officially registered, a second organisation, namely the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education, was set up under the leadership of T.N. Palit and his colleagues.<sup>16</sup> The former group under Satish Mukherjee stood for

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14. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

15. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 79.

16. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 16-17.



complete educational autarchy and aspired after instituting the 'three dimensional system' of education i.e. literary, scientific and technical, combined on national lines and under national control. The latter group, headed by Tarak Nath Palit and others, wanted simply to supplement the all-too literary education of the existing system by a regular arrangement for technical education under national management.<sup>17</sup> The Society for the Promotion of Technical Education set up the Bengal Technical Institute (July 25, 1906), while the National Council established the Bengal national College and School (August 14, 1906). Aurobindo Ghosh became the first Principal or academic head of the Bengal National College (August 1907 - July 1907) and Satish Mukherjee, its first Superintendent or administrative head (August 1906 - August 1908).<sup>18</sup> The unfortunate split between the National Council of Education and the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education came to an end in 1910 by the merger of the two institutions into one on certain conditions.<sup>19</sup>

The next phase in the National Education movement witnessed the activities of the Bengal National College and school on a countrywide scale (1906-08). The Bengal National College and School and the Technical Institute in spite of their ideological differences, together constituted a well-planned attempt at revolutionising the entire educational system of Bengal<sup>20</sup> But it was not long before that the National College lost its popularity, and during World War I, it virtually ceased to exist. The Bengal Technical Institute, later taken over by the N.C.E., Bengal, however survived, and continued even after independence as the College of Engineering and Technology, Bengal.<sup>21</sup>

The ideas of the National Council of Education gradually spread into the villages of Bengal, and numerous schools were organised in different districts. From 1906 to 1908, about 100 schools were set up, and the numerical strength of the pupils rose almost to 5000. Satish Mukherjee was the Superintendent of the National College from August 1906 to August, 1908, and as the Honorary Principal for one year, following Aurobindo's retirement in mid-1907.<sup>22</sup>

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17. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 79-80.

18. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 17-18.

19. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 82.

20. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

21. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 85.

22. Haridas Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

The doom of the National College was inevitable because the popular enthusiasm for national education was more an expression of hatred against the oppressive alien government than the result of a genuine desire to be educated on national lines. In any case, such a desire was not strong enough to call for the sacrifice that study in the Bengal National College involved. To the Bengalis of those days admission into the National College meant an end of all hopes of government jobs, of ease and security in life, and certainly a leap into the dark. Students were attracted to it at the beginning, mainly because a section of them felt a strong hatred towards schools and colleges under the Calcutta University which was under the Government's control. Besides, a large number of students, expelled from schools and colleges for participating in the Boycott movement, were obliged to join this institution. It was the need to provide for such students that gave birth to the idea of national education. But the number of expelled students was not large enough to maintain the National College. The same thing was true of the national schools.<sup>23</sup>

Bepin Chandra Pal, an extremist leader of this period, also devoted much thought to the question of national education. He wanted an educational system which would be a harmonious blend of modernity and tradition. He declared that, "in the system of education that we propose to start in the country, liberal and scientific culture will be combined with technical education." This combination of liberal, scientific and technical education invariably implied the need of retaining connection with western education. Pal retained his stand on this central theme, whether in starting a National School at Sylhet or by getting himself associated with the National Council of Education in Calcutta. Although there was a substantial agreement between Tilak and Pal with regard to educational reforms, there were differences between them on points of emphasis and allocation of priorities. In Tilak's scheme, religious education received the first and foremost place, and he favoured the introduction of religious studies in the curriculum. Pal never conceived of any such thing. Both were, however, eager to rekindle our national consciousness. Pal even went a step further, and drew a distinction between 'literacy' and 'education'. Education meant wisdom enabling formation of character for one's

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23. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 85-86.



work in life. On his second visit to England which commenced in September, 1908, Pal said, "I have intensively moved among the English working classes during these three years...I have never seen that in wisdom they are superior to our masses to understand social, political, economic, or religious matters. Our people have a particular cultural educational orientation. We should bear this in mind when we prepare our programme for a drive for literacy or mass education." Pal wanted that education should work as a cementing force in race-fusion and national integration. Pal visualized this as early as 1898. For this purpose he even suggested reform of the Civil Service Examination in which he said, "Sanskrit must be a compulsory subject of examination along with other vernaculars and Hindusthani, since Hindusthani is the lingua franca of India".<sup>24</sup> Bepin Chandra Pal wanted the Swadeshi Movement to bring about not merely political freedom but also a real spiritual revival among his people. For this reason he put much emphasis upon reorganising our educational system on completely national lines. He was associated with the National Council of Education from its very inception.<sup>25</sup>

Sister Nivedita, a great inspirer of the Bengal revolutionary movement, wrote in an article in the *Dawn Magazine* in its issue of February, 1904, that educational institution must spring from the life of the nation. These must represent the aims and ends of a nation, as it was in old times. The present system was quite inappropriate and not in touch with the national life."<sup>26</sup>

Aurobindo regarded educational boycott as an essential feature of the integrated structure of boycott for, on one hand, he envisaged it as a potent weapon in the struggle for national liberation, and, on the other, he realized that this aspect of boycott would directly affect and enthuse the student community, whose active support would be a great asset to the nationalists in their struggle. In fact, both these assumptions proved to be true, and, in particular, the students of Bengal played a heroic part in the crucial years of 1905-'10 in spreading the cult of *swadeshi* and boycott through Bengal despite severe repression and

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24. A.P. Mukherjee, *Social and Political Ideas of B.C. Pal*, pp. 46-47.

25. S.P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. III, (Calcutta, 1974) p. 287.

26. *The Dawn Magazine*, February, 1904, microfilmed, J. Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi.



intimidation by the authorities. Aurobindo wrote, "we are dissatisfied also with the conditions under which education is imparted in this country, its calculated poverty and insufficiency, its antinational character, its subordination to the Government and the use made of that subordination for the discouragement of patriotism and inculcation of loyalty. Accordingly, we refuse to send our boys to Government schools or to schools aided and controlled by the Government; if this educational boycott is general and well organized, the educational administration of the country will be rendered impossible and the control of its youthful minds pass out of the hands of the foreigners."<sup>27</sup> Though, as the first Principal of the Bengal National College, Aurobindo was closely associated with the national education movement, from contemporary reports it is clear that his active role in the nationalist politics did not leave him much time to devote to the details of college administration.<sup>28</sup> Aurobindo was the academic head of the college during 1906-'07 while its administration was looked after by the superintendent, Satish Chandra Mukherjee. Later, for some time before May 1908, Aurobindo again served the college as Professor of History.

In the District Conference at Pabna, Aurobindo explained the aims and ideals of national education in the following words: "The university system was defective in its aims and methods, intended only to serve the purposes of the government, not the requirements of the country. It turned out machines for administrative and professional work and not men. The national system of education was intended to create a nation. It must produce men with all their faculties trained, full of patriotism and mentally, morally and physically, the equals of the men of any other nation."<sup>29</sup> In a speech delivered by him on the occasion of his farewell from the Bengal National College in August, 1907, he said, "when we established this college...we hoped to see in it the foundation, the nucleus of a nation...what we want here is not merely to give you a little information, not merely to open to you careers...but to build up sons for the Motherland to work and to suffer for her."<sup>30</sup>

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27. Karan Singh, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, pp. 128-129, f. n. Doctrine of Passive Resistance, p. 37.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

29. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 83-84.

30. Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram : Early Political Writings* (Pondicherry, 1973), p. 516. First published on 23.8.1907.

Aurobindo further wrote in the *Bande Mataram* (Daily) (February 24, 1908), "National education may be described tentatively as the education which starting with the past and making full use of the present builds up a great nation...we must therefore save for India all that she has stored up of knowledge, character and noble thought in her immemorial past. We must acquire for her the best knowledge that Europe can give her and assimilate it to her own peculiar type of national temperament. We must introduce the best methods of teaching humanity has developed, whether modern or ancient. And all these we must harmonise into a system which will be impregnated with the spirit of self-reliance so as to build up men and not machines - national men, able men, men fit to carve out a career for themselves by their own brain power and resource, fit to meet the shocks of life..."<sup>31</sup> "we advocate national education...as the only way to secure truly national and patriotic control and discipline for the mind of the country in its malleable youth."<sup>32</sup> He further wrote that *swadeshi* in education meant an education suited to the temperament and needs of the people, fitted to build up a nation, equipped for life under modern conditions, and absolutely controlled by Indians.<sup>33</sup> The only way of inculcating a quality into a nation was by installing it practically into the minds of its youth at school and college until it became an ingrained, inherent and inherited national quality. "We have to fill the minds of our boys from childhood with the idea of the country, present them with that idea at every turn and make their whole young life a lesson in the practice of the virtues which afterwards go to make the patriot and the citizen. Without such a discipline, nationalism, patriotism, regeneration are mere words and ideas which can never become a part of the very soul of the nation..."<sup>34</sup>

Thus to Pal and Aurobindo, the object of national education was not purely academic. In Pal's view it was "the realisation of the national destiny." It was meant to produce historians, philosophers, painters and original scientists and not merely to impart the know-how of industrialization. To Aurobindo, national education was "giving India back the

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 718. First published on 24.2.1908.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

33. *Bande Mataram*, weekly, microfilmed, July 14, 1907, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, N. Delhi.

34. *Bande Mataram*, (Daily), May 28th, 1907.



long lost treasure of her race, the passion for self-knowledge". The reasoned presentation of liberty to the people was the most important work of nationalism. National education was accessory to this work. It prepared the cultural soil on which liberty could thrive.<sup>35</sup> Aurobindo expressed the hope that "the national schools will train and send out workers who will devote themselves completely to the service of the country and raise her once more to the old position of glory which she once occupied in the family of nations."<sup>36</sup>

National Education was therefore to have as its goal not merely the acquisition of knowledge but the development of a national and modern outlook. the vernacular was to be the chief medium of instruction, but foreign languages were not to be neglected. Scientific and technical education were calculated "to develop the material resources of the country and to satisfy its pressing wants". This strictly utilitarian aim was, however, embroidered with a pious intention to imbibe scientific truths embodied in classical oriental learning. National education was not an obscurantist revival of Hindu scholasticism. It was "exclusively under national control, not in opposition to but standing apart from the existing systems of primary, secondary and university education". National schools were started in many parts of the country with more dreams than resources.<sup>37</sup>

In a number of essays, serialized in the *Karmayogin* in 1909, Aurobindo expressed his idea of 'integral education', which were published in a book-form under the title *A System of National Education*. These essays presented a new approach to the problem of education from the standpoint of Indian psychology. In them Aurobindo emphasized the spiritual aspect in the development of the individual.<sup>38</sup> Here we find a difference between the attitudes of Pal and Aurobindo, for Pal did not recognise the spiritual aspect in the field of education. Aurobindo laid down three principles on which the edifice of national education was to be built up. The first of these was that the thirst for knowledge was the quality of the soul. The innate qualities of every pupil must be found out by the teacher. The urge to develop the

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35. A. Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, p. 122.

36. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 83.

37. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 121-122.

38. G.N. Sharma (ed.), *The Vision of Sri Aurobindo*, articles entitled 'A Scheme of National Education' by V.S. Joshi, p. 120.



faculties of mind must come from within and could not be imposed. The second principle was to provide opportunities and guidance for free growth of the individual's mind, and here the teacher's duty was to help the pupil when he stumbled on his way and to encourage him to go ahead. The third principle of education was 'to work from the near to the far.' Here he was speaking about a sort of natural habitat, the hereditary, the environmental and the cultural which went together to shape human nature. Any system of education must take into account these various factors and should be suited to them. To make it succeed, the system of education must have its roots in the cultural heritage of the particular people. Aurobindo put a great emphasis on moral education and formation of a good moral character. He made a plea for the development of mind and the senses as a pre-condition for the pursuit of knowledge, both scientific, material, metaphysical and supra-rational, because purification of mind was essential for the liberation, purification and perfect action of the intellect.<sup>39</sup>

Rashbehary Ghose, the eminent moderate leader, in the course of a speech delivered in 1911, in support of the establishment of a Hindu University, observed that education "must have its roots deep down in national sentiments and national tradition...We are the heirs of an ancient civilization and the true office of education ought to be the encouragement of a gradual and spontaneous growth of the ideals which have given a definite mould to our culture and our institutions... In our curriculum, therefore, Hindu ethics and metaphysics will occupy a foremost place, the Western system being used only for purposes of contrast and illustration. Special attention will also be paid to a knowledge of the country, its literature, its arts, its philosophy and its history."<sup>40</sup> Ghose, it should be remembered, was for many years the President of the National Council of Education which gave birth to the Bengal National College.

The Anushilan Samiti for the first time set up a workingmen's institution in Calcutta. Members of the Samiti voluntarily taught the children of the poor workers at night and during holidays.<sup>41</sup> The first

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39. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-129, 133-135.

40. Dr. Rashbehary Ghose, *Speeches Delivered On Various Occasions* (Calcutta, 1915), pp. 176-177.

41. Jibantara Halder, *Anushilan Samitir Itihas*, (Calcutta, 1950), p. 15.

workingmen's institute set up by them was the 'Bangiya Sramajibi Vidyalaya' on Raja Dinendra Street, Calcutta. This institute first took up the work of adult literacy both among the urban labourers and the rural peasantry. They first initiated the programme of mass education in rural areas through magic lantern demonstration. Again, this band of youngmen gave an impetus to the cultivation of a wider intellectual outlook by encouraging study of books not included in the academic curriculum. Thereby, they helped the development of the library movement in Bengal. Sashi Bhusan Roy Choudhury of Sodepur was the first to organise a night school in his village, Teghara, in the 24 Paraganas, for the day-labourers. That school rendered useful service as a centre for literacy and vocational training. He initiated in Bengal what later came to be known as the night school movement.<sup>42</sup>

Government records throw much light on the National School at Dacca. In August, 1908, after the Dacca Anushilan Samiti had been searched, the names and addresses of all persons found there were taken down by the police. The members of the Samiti, without exception, described themselves as students of the National School, Dacca. There was the closest connection between the Samiti, which started in the premises No. 50, Wari and the National School which was situated next door. In fact, the Samiti was really an annexe of the National School. Pulin Behari Das was then one of the teachers of this school. In July, 1908, the Samiti was removed from No. 50, Wari to No. 452, South Maisundi, renamed as Bajrapuri. In October, 1908, the National School was also removed to the same premises, and it continued to be held there until police searches were made in November. "It is clear that there has always been the closest connection between the Samiti and the National School. The Samiti provided teachers independently for its members... Pulin Das realised that the intelligence of his embryo revolutionists must be developed and therefore it was really intended that young boys who joined the Samiti should be provided with suitable education."

"There was also a system of keeping diaries by the members of the Samiti. It is found from the diary of a youth that he rose at 5-10 one day, played lathi from 6 to 8, studied from 8 to 10, then took his meal and studied again. He spent the evenings on the streets apparently at

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42. A.C. Guha, *The First Spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), pp. 97, 119.



political meetings where "many things are discussed." This sort of experience might have been common among the young boys of the Samiti. Where they did receive any education at all, we have seen that it was extremely meagre, if not deserving contempt. As for the elaborate syllabuses and courses of studies and classes, two alternative explanations suggest themselves : either they were drawn up as "false words of hope to attract common people" and delude them into the belief that their sons would get an excellent education for nothing, or they perhaps represent a scheme emanating from Pulin's own brain, well-meant in itself but abandoned directly when it was put on paper. The teaching which a boy might expect in the Samiti was excellently summed up by Pulin himself in the postcard addressed to Sarada Charan Chakrabarty of Routhbhog which was translated as, "If you are ready to sacrifice your life for the Samiti, I will take you in and give you suitable education; you must, of course, give up the idea of attending any school." Whatever the exact truth might be, this much was certain that the education in the Samiti was practically non-existent. The real business of the Samiti was to train up revolutionaries and their education chiefly consisted in the study of seditious literature.<sup>43</sup>

According to the government report, from 1906-08 about 100 national schools were set up in different districts of Bengal, and the number of students was about 5000. For bringing the primary school age group students under the scope of the scheme of national education, a number of national *pathsalas* were opened in the interior of the mufassil districts. Some of these *pathsalas* received grant-in-aid from the National Council of Education.<sup>44</sup>

C.A. Tegart, a top-ranking police officer, in his report, stated that as regards the curriculum of the national schools, "the second year students are still required to study historical stories calculated to inspire boys with a love for all that is really good and noble. The inspiration to serve their country is noted in the schemes of study. The vernacular prose reader, *Aryakirti* by Rajani Kanta Gupta is an objectionable book for it is a series of short accounts given of the celebrated Hindus, male

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43. Home Political Deposit, August, 1909, 20-21. Conf. H.L. Salkeld's Report on the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, National Archives, N. Delhi.

44. Freedom Papers (non. confi.), *An Account of the Swadeshi Movement*, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.



and female, who are known to have devoted their lives to the service and advancement of their countrymen or performed great deeds of valour, patriotism and self-sacrifice. The vernacular poetry *Palasir Juddha* (War of Plassey) would seem to be an unsuitable book for students. The *Gita* is also prescribed in the scheme of study.” But the Government Reports show that the financial condition of most of these schools was far from satisfactory and there was a gradual fall in the number of national schools, as many ceased to exist due to deterioration in the number of the students : For the students attending the national schools realized the difficulties encountered in obtaining employment at the conclusion of their school careers. The guardians also appreciating the risk in the national schools, applied for application of their wards into recognised schools. Even teachers of national schools applied for employment in the education department. All these proved that the national school movement was fast losing its strength and popularity in the second decade of the present century.<sup>45</sup>

It may be concluded that the reasons for the decline of the national education movement should be sought elsewhere. Those who were educated in the national schools or the Bengal National College in Calcutta had little chance of securing good jobs, and opportunities for self-employment through business or industry were also very limited in those days. Moreover, many of the ideas of the promoters of national education (minus, of course their patriotic fervour) were absorbed by the Calcutta University in later days under the guidance of the great educationist, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee. People’s interest in national education, therefore, did not last long, though the College of Engineering and Technology, Bengal, started under the auspices of the National Council of Education became more and more popular with the passage of time, and ultimately flowered into the Jadavpur University after the advent of independence (December, 1955).

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45. Home Political, Conf. File No. 78 (1-6), 1913, Home Political, Conf. File No. 655 (1-4), 1916, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

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**CHARACTER OF THE  
BENGAL REVOLUTIONARY  
MOVEMENT AND IMPACT OF  
FOREIGN IDEAS AND  
EXAMPLES UPON IT**



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The militant nationalist movement in Bengal during the first two decades of the present century was essentially a middle class movement which, however, received support from sections of other social classes as well.

When the Manicktola Conspiracy was detected by the British Government in May, 1908, among the revolutionaries arrested and sent to prison were the Raja of Narajole Narendranath Goswami, a scion of the zamindar family of Serampore in the Hooghly district.<sup>1</sup> Eminent zamin-dars like Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya Choudhury of Mymensingh and Brajendra Kishore Ray Chaudhuri of Gauripur helped the revolutionaries with money. Less opulent men also offered help at considerable personal risk.<sup>2</sup> According to the police report, boycott and picketing were in full swing both in towns and villages, mainly due to the support of the landholders who actively encouraged the boycott through their 'naibs' and peons.<sup>3</sup> The landlords of Northern and Eastern Bengal apprehended in the Partition of Bengal a pretext for the revision of the Permanent Settlement. Rich zamindars set up a national fund to finance weaving schools. Some of them also provided funds for setting up the National Council of Education, Bengal.<sup>4</sup> But after Naren Gossain's confession in the Alipur Bomb Case, the flow of money from

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1. Motilal Roy, *Amar Dekha Biplab O Biplabi*. (Calcutta, 1957), p.24.
  2. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*. Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1963), p. 268.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
  4. Amallesh Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, pp. 115-116, 119-121.

the rich and upper class people to the revolutionary secret societies practically ceased. There was much substance in the argument that the zamindars and the professional middle class had joined the Swadeshi movement, largely guided by the desire to advance their economic interests. In the changed political environment of Bengal after the Alipur Bomb Case, (1908-'09) they seemed very much hesitant to financially support the secret revolutionary movement, as they did not find any prospect for their professional and economic advancement in such a movement. Nevertheless, there were noble exceptions like Suryakanta Acharya Choudhury, Subodh Chandra Basu Mullick, Misri Babu of the Uttarpara Mukherjee family, Narendralal Khan of Narajole and a few others.<sup>5</sup> Some pioneers of the movement like Pramatha Nath Mitra and Aurobindo Ghosh had an upper middle class background.<sup>6</sup> But, it was mainly the sons of the English-educated middle class families who played a prominent part in the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal.<sup>7</sup> Jadugopal Mukherjee, a veteran revolutionary, was the son of a lawyer.<sup>8</sup> Makhan Lal Sen was the son of an Assistant Surgeon of Sibpur Engineering College in Calcutta.<sup>9</sup> Bhupati Majumdar, an important member of the Jugantar Party, was the son of a Vakil, practising in the Hooghly Court.<sup>10</sup> Pulin Behari Das, the Chief Organiser of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, was the son of Nabakumar Das, who was regarded as the best lawyer of the Madaripur Bar.<sup>11</sup> Professional men such as Government servants, service-holders, doctors, compounders, pleaders, teachers, writers and newspapermen, participated in the movement, both by taking active part in it, and by offering help and assistance to the revolutionaries in their respective professional capacities.<sup>12</sup> For example, Professor Jyotish Chandra Ghosh was one of the important members of the revolutionary centre

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5. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Freedom struggle and the Anusilan Samiti*, Vol. I, article entitled, 'Anushilan Samiti as a revolutionary party' by Saral Kumar Chatterjee, p. 49.
  6. *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 34.
  7. Motilal Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 77.
  8. Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Biplabi Jibaneer Smriti*, (Calcutta, 1363, B.E.), p. 72.
  9. History Sheet No. 226, Conf. History Sheet of Makhan Lal Sen, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  10. Home Political, A, June, 1919, No. 92-97, K.W. Conf. History sheet of Bhupati Mozumdar, National Archives, N. Delhi.
  11. Jibantara Haldar, *Anusilan Samitir Itihas*, pp. 42-43.
  12. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Jagaran O Bishpharan*, Vol. II, (Calcutta, 1973), p. 278.



at Chandernagore; he used to teach in the Hooghly College and inspired his students with the ideal of freedom.<sup>13</sup> Motilal Biswas, a leader of the Anushilan Samiti of Mymensingh, who happened to be a teacher of the local Mrityunjay High School, used to do the same thing.<sup>14</sup> Satish Chandra Chakravarti, a leading pleader of the Pabna district, went of Muzaffarpore to defend the case of Khudiram Bose.<sup>15</sup> Suresh Chandra Chatterjee, a pleader of Dacca, was a great sympathiser of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti; he used to help the Samiti with occasional loans and accepted no fees for defending political cases.<sup>16</sup> Doctor Sundari Mohan Das, a patron of the Anushilan Samiti in Calcutta, is said to have been a medical attendant to the members of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti.<sup>17</sup> Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, the founder of a revolutionary Samiti in Barisal, was the owner of a mica mine in Giridih and also the proprietor of one of the most virulent and seditious newspapers published in Calcutta, the *Navasakti*. He was a strong financial supporter of the Manicktola Garden group.<sup>18</sup> Hemnath Roy of Burdwan who was an employee in the Government telegraph office at Burdwan, supplied the time table of the Lieutenant Governor, Kingsford's special train during the Chandernagore attempt.<sup>19</sup> The Sedition Committee Report also pointed out the fact that the conspirators in Bengal were mainly youngmen belonging to the educated *bhadralok* class.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, lower middle class people including artisans and shopkeepers also sometimes came forward to help the revolutionaries, being inspired by their patriotic and self-sacrificing spirit. A goldsmith named Ashutosh Niyogi had a small jewellery shop in

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13. Motilal Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.
  14. Political A, January, 1917, Nos. 405-409, Conf., Statement of Suresh Chandra Chakravarty, National Archives, New Delhi.
  15. History Sheet No. 42, Conf. History Sheet of Satish Chandra Chakravarti, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  16. Home Political A, Conf. May, 1917, Nos. 153-160, k.w. Statement of Indu Bhusan Chakravarty, National Archives, New Delhi.
  17. History Sheet of Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, No. 724, Conf. West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  18. History Sheet of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Conf. No. 34, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.
  19. Home Political Deposit, Conf. August, 1911, No. 9, Statement of Upendranath Banerjee, National Archives, New Delhi.
  20. Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt (ed.), *Sedition Committee Report*, pp. 19, 129.

Chandernagore, and he helped the revolutionary organisation by collecting large quantities of sulphuric and nitric acid that was required for making bombs. Ashutosh was an out and out revolutionary and spent much of his modest income on promoting revolutionary activities.<sup>21</sup> In the district of Mymensingh, Ramani Mohan Das, an ordinary employee of a zamindar, rose to the eminence of a respected leader by dint of his sincerity, ability and skill. Khagendranath Kahali, a government employee, assumed the leadership of the Noakhali district organization.<sup>22</sup> The East India Railway strike of July, 1906, heralded the percolation of extremist propaganda beyond the lower middle class groups. There were three successive strikes at Fort Gloucester Jute Mills (Bowreah) in the first half of 1906. A British-owned mill was thus chosen as the first target, showing the extent of nationalist influence upon the workers. The strike was really an explosion of anti-imperialist hatred. The lower middle class unemployed who could not fall back on land sometimes joined the rank of the revolutionaries. Valentine Chirol referred to the discontent roused by the Public Service Commission of Lord Dufferin (1886-87), for it separated the Europeans and Indians in the Education Department, and the number of unemployed educated youngmen in Bengal rose to 40,000. It is not surprising that the sympathizers of the revolutionary movement in Bengal came largely from the student community.<sup>23</sup>

But, generally speaking, the Bengal revolutionaries did not have any strong feeling for the masses and the ideas of the Bengal revolutionaries did not have any great appeal to the masses i.e. the peasants, artisans and labourers. Though industrial workers in and around Calcutta and peasants in Barisal agitated during the Swadeshi movement, yet, for the most part, peasants and workers remained indifferent to or aloof from the movement. The revolutionaries could not rouse the working class and the poor peasantry because they had nothing yet to offer them.<sup>24</sup> Although the revolutionaries realized the importance of mass support and sympathy for the success of their

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21. Motilal Roy, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 79-80.

22. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, article by Saral Kumar Chatterjee, p. 61.

23. A. Tripathi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118, 144.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 145.



movement and sometimes preached the necessity of mass contact, the very nature of their activities (which had to be carried in secret) prevented them from coming into close contact with the masses.

Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, in his book, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, pointed out the fact that the revolutionaries were totally out of touch with the common people. People from all classes except the peasants and labourers became members of the secret societies in Bengal.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the revolutionary movement remained confined to the bourgeois class. No serious attempt was made to propagate revolutionary idealism among the peasants, porters, labourers, grocers, hawkers, etc. i.e. those comprising the proletariat class.<sup>26</sup> The common people of the country never understood the importance of political freedom or liberation from British rule, and so they never sympathised with the ideas and activities of the revolutionaries. It was only during the non-co-operation movement of the 1920's that there was positive response from the Indian masses to Gandhi's call for non-violent non-co-operation with our rulers.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta has remarked that the Indian Revolutionaries were bourgeois nationalists.<sup>28</sup> There was also a category of persons, mostly professional people like advocates, doctors and teachers who showed intellectual appreciation of revolutionary activities and, carried away by the revolutionary fervour, joined the movement for some time but backed out when the call came for the sacrifice of their own interests.<sup>29</sup>

Chief Justice Jenkins held in the Alipur Conspiracy Case that the accused were "for the most part men of education, of strong religious convictions." This was true more or less of all the revolutionaries of Bengal.<sup>30</sup> Barring a few brilliant exceptions like Aurobindo, Prof. Ladli-mohan Mitra, (a professor of Chemistry in the Bangabasi College, Calcutta), and Dr. Rashiklal Dutta (Industrial Chemist to the Govt. of Bengal who secretly gave advice to make experiments on the materials

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25. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, p. 13.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

27. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Aprakashita Rajnaitik Itihas*, (Calcutta, 1953), pp. 108-109, 112.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

29. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, p. 68.

30. Biman Behari Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism In India*, (Calcutta, 1966), p. 116.



required to make bombs), most of the Bengal revolutionaries were not very highly educated in the formal sense. Few of them were graduates. For example B.C. Pal could not pass the First Arts Examination of Calcutta University and M.N. Roy was expelled from his school.<sup>31</sup> A close study of the history sheets and statements of the Bengal revolutionaries (of the period of our discussion) as available in the National Archives and in the West Bengal State Archives reveal the fact the most of the revolutionaries were young and unmarried, and were either school-going or college-going students. They came either from respectable and well-to-do families or from mediocre middle class families.

The Sedition Committee Report reveals the 31 percent of the Bengal Revolutionaries were students, 50 of them belonged to the age group of 20-24 while 155 out of 186 persons (83 percent) were below the age of 31. It is worth noting that in 1905 Aurobindo was only 33 years old. There was only one person among the Bengal revolutionaries whose age was over 45.<sup>32</sup> (Monoranjan Guha Thakurta was aged about 50 years in 1909).<sup>33</sup> Even adolescents of 10-15 years of age joined the movement, though persons belonging to the age group 21-25 were the largest in number.<sup>34</sup> The age group of the workers of Dacca Anushilan Samiti was between 18 and 24.<sup>35</sup>

The revolutionary movement in Bengal cannot be called 'terrorist' in the proper sense of the term. The terms 'terrorism' and 'anarchism' used by the British Government do not really convey the true spirit of this movement. In fact, these two terms were repudiated by the revolutionaries themselves as unjust, unfair and inaccurate. They rightly pointed out that the members of the underground movement in Bengal were neither anarchists nor nihilists whose only aim was to create chaos or confusion. Even though their method of work might differ, they were all inspired by the common aim of ousting the British from

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 73, f.n., Jibantara Haldar, *Anusilan Samitir Itihas.*, pp. 19-20.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

33. History sheet of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Confidential No. 34, W. Bengal State Archives.

34. Kali Charan Ghosh, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 278.

35. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 59, article by Saral Kumar Chatterjee.

India once and for all and the thereby establishing *Purna Swaraj* or absolute independence which became the goal of the Indian National Congress in 1929. The so-called terrorist activities were neither sudden and isolated reactions against any specific measure of the Government nor designed as a remedy against any particular grievance. The overt acts of the revolutionary secret societies such as dacoities and assassinations were the outward manifestations of a determined and violent resistance to the British Government with the deliberate object of overthrowing their rule in India. Whatever their method of work, the members of the extreme school of militant nationalists were revolutionaries, pure and simple. It is curious to note that the *Sedition Committee Report* of 1918 also used the term 'revolutionary' in their report, while describing crimes like political dacoities and murder of Government officials. This is the just and proper designation of the members of the militant nationalist groups during the period under review.<sup>36</sup>

It is interesting to note in this connection that B.C. Pal reiterated in later days, "And if violence did come in the wake of the nationalist movement 17 years ago, it was not a part of the nationalist programme. It came in spite of the declared nationalist policy of non-violence or passive resistance. The responsibility for it must be accepted by the repressive policy of the government that drove some impatient spirits to revolutionary ways..."<sup>37</sup> Barindra Kumar Ghosh during his trial, said "We never believed that political murder will bring independence."<sup>38</sup> Aurobindo is sometimes criticised as an anarchist and terrorist. But, it should be borne in mind that he sought to replace British rule not by anarchy but by national rule. So the proposition that he was an anarchist is absurd. Regarding terrorism, it may be said that he not only had an intimate link with the revolutionary secret societies throughout the country, but in Bengal, he was, the secret leader and one of the Chief inspirers of the revolutionaries. The deliverance of the Motherland from foreign yoke was, to him, the supreme consideration, for which purpose all means including the use of violence and force were

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36. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 160-161, 163.

37. A.P. Mukherjee, *Social and Political Ideas of B.C. Pal*, p. 77, f.n. Passing politics, *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 3, No.5, September 12, 1922, pp. 79-80.

38. A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, (Allahabad, 1971), p. 222.



justifiable. The charge is in consonance with his basic political ideal.<sup>39</sup> Some revolutionaries like Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee did not believe in terrorism.<sup>40</sup> Motilal Roy in his book, *Amar Dekha Biplob O Biplabi*, wrote that the young revolutionaries of Bengal tried to overthrow the British Government through violence and terrorism since all other means of revolution were closed.<sup>41</sup> Arun Chandra Guha in his book, entitled *The First Spark of Revolution*, remarked that the movement was never a terrorist movement. It was rather a movement for courting suffering and self-immolation at the altar of independence of the Motherland. The Indian Revolutionaries never believed that acts of individual terrorism would directly promote mass action.<sup>42</sup> A comparison between the ideas of B.C. Pal and Aswini Kumar Dutta with that of Aurobindo Ghosh shows that Aurobindo was a revolutionary in the full sense of the term. He was a class by himself whereas B.C. Pal was totally against terrorism and held moderate views in politics; while Aswini Kumar Dutta's revolutionary activities were limited to the village only.

The main aim of the revolutionaries of Bengal was to achieve the independence of India by overthrowing the foreign rule. To attain this goal, they adopted the means of armed resistance, both open and secret, as it was the only means available at that time. Terrorism was certainly one of the methods of work adopted by the revolutionaries, but anarchy formed no part of their movement. The British Government was a very powerful enemy, and the Indians' precarious position as the subject nation did not leave them with any other alternative means to adopt in the struggle for freedom, except that of violence. The revolutionaries fully realised that they were no match for the formidable British Government in the open field of battle as they neither had sufficient arms, ammunitions and money, nor proper military training and experience to fight against the mighty British Empire. So they sought to strike terror in the heart of the British Government by incessant violent acts and thereby to slacken their hold over the country. This, they hoped, would, in the long run, compel the British Government to grant independence to India. At the same time,

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39. Karan Singh, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, p. 174.

40. Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

41. Motilal Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 151.

42. A.C. Guha, *The First Spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 27.



it may be pointed out that the Bengal Revolutionaries were not out and out terrorists, believing only in the use of force, for they also adopted the means of passive resistance (boycott and *swadeshi*) against the British Government. Hence the revolutionary movement in Bengal cannot be labelled as a purely terrorist movement.

The revolutionary movement in Bengal had a sort of religious character. A survey of the literature of the movement discloses overwhelming evidence of the religious sanction with which its chief organisers sought to endow it. Even revolutionary documents such as letters, orders and pamphlets were commonly headed with the Hindu invocation "Om". This invocation was associated in the mind of every Hindu with the distinctive philosophy of his race. As Lord Zetland pointed out, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the most widely treasured, perhaps, of all the sacred books of the Hindus, the revolutionaries found material which torn from its context, could be made to wear the appearance of giving religious sanction to acts of violence.<sup>43</sup> Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta also wrote in his book, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, that most of the leaders of the movement were staunch Hindus and saw the ideal of revolution through the eyes of religion. Though a few among the revolutionaries were followers of the Brahmo faith, they soon began to think in terms of Hinduism, being swayed by the tide of religious nationalism.<sup>44</sup> The revolutionary movement sought to revive India's historic past and placed before themselves the great ideal of the religio-cultural re-assertion of the soul of India. There was, however, no organic connection between revolutionary nationalism and religious orthodoxy, and many orthodox Hindus opposed the movement as well.<sup>45</sup> Bepin Chandra Pal wrote, "What I want in India is the growth of a great spiritual revival among the people...". He held that the new Indian nationalism must not lose its foothold in the past, nor should it lose its vision of the future.<sup>46</sup> The new 'spiritual nationalism' of Aurobindo and other leaders of his time has been criticised on the ground that it appealed to Hindu chauvinism in order to gain popularity, and that this widened the rift between the Hindus and the

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43. Lord Zetland, *the Heart of Aryavarta*, pp. 103-104, 116.

44. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, p. 36.

45. M.A. Buch, *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism*, Vol. 3, (Baroda, 1940), p. 198.

46. Hans Kohn, *A History Of Nationalism In The East*, (London, 1929), p. 398.

Muslims which finally led to the partition of India. It should be noted here that the key role of the revolutionaries was to transform the national movement from a narrow intellectual pastime of the English-educated intelligentsia into an active struggle against our alien rulers. Unless the common people, the vast majority of whom were Hindus, were awakened from their stupor, they could not have been able to achieve this transformation in the face of severe repression by the British Government. This, in turn, was impossible unless the common people were deeply influenced by Hindu religious ideas because it was only for the sake of religion that they could be induced to lay down their lives and sacrifice all their worldly ambitions. Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, a revolutionary leader, rightly observed, "It is not surprising that the founders and leaders of the [Anushilan] Samiti found this faith in religion. For the Indian educated public did scarcely accept positivism as a faith to live by. Politics was infused with religion, and the idea of a secular politics was still not attractive".<sup>46A</sup> To this, may be added the fact that most of the revolutionary leaders were Hindus by birth and some had deep religious and spiritual convictions. They appealed to the Hindus at large, without having any deliberate intention to minimise the importance of or weaken any other religion of India. In his 'Open letter to my countrymen' (1909), Aurobindo wrote, "our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood, and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind". His nationalism, thus, never descended into narrow chauvinism or obscurantist revivalism.<sup>47</sup>

However, it cannot be denied that the images, symbols, songs, slogans, religious ideas, rituals, phrases and idioms round which the movement was built up and carried through were all essentially Hindu in spirit, -- Hindu not in a narrow religious sense but in a broad religio-cultural one. As regards the members of the secret revolutionary organizations, their behaviour pattern, from the process of initiation in the revolutionary fold by taking an oath before the image of Goddess Kali, to the carrying of the *Gita* with them while going out for an 'action' were highly coloured by the Hindu religio-cultural tradition. The Swadeshi and Boycott movements of 1905-'10 were inspired by the

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46A. Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, *In Search Of Freedom* (Calcutta, 1966), p. 26.

47. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 81-82, 175-176.



spirit of Hindu sub-nationalism.<sup>48</sup> The spiritual training given to the members of the Anushilan Samity in Calcutta and Dacca as well as other such organizations in Bengal, to enable them to build up a strong moral character also involved the use of Hindu scriptures and religious texts. Besides, the works of Swami Vivekananda, the *Gita*, the *Chandi*, and the Upanishads were studied by almost all revolutionaries. A study of the religious ideas cherished by the Bengal revolutionaries also reveals the fact that the Hindu religious sentiments were greatly utilized to popularise the new cult of *swaraj* and the worship of the motherland. B.C. Pal and Aurobindo even equated the notions of 'freedom' and 'nationalism' with God and preached the ideal of revival of the ancient Hindu religion and culture in their original grandeur and purity.

The strong Hindu character of the revolutionary nationalism gave a great impetus to the revival of Hindu life, and at the same time widened the gulf between the Hindus and the Mohammedans considerably.<sup>49</sup>

In spite of the British policy of 'divide and rule' and the attempt made by vested interests to work upon the religious sentiments of the Muslims, a section of the Muslim community felt the impact of the new spirit of nationalism preached by the Bengal Revolutionaries. Men like Abdul Rasul, Liakat Hossain, Abdul Halim Ghaznavi of Mymensingh, Abdul Kasem of Burdwan, Yusuf Khan Bahadur and Mohammed Ismail Chowdhury became its trusted and accredited exponents, and supported the Swadeshi movement and Anti-Partition agitation.<sup>50</sup> Abdul Rasul, a barrister, presided over the Bengal Provincial Conference at Barisal in April, 1906, in a meeting held at Pabna on 19th May, 1906, he advised the Hindus and Mohammedans not to use Liverpool salt, British cloth or foreign sugar. While presiding over the District Conference at Commilla in February, 1907, he exhorted his Hindu and Mohammedan listeners to sink their individual differences in order to obtain *swaraj*.<sup>51</sup> Liyaqat Hussain was the president of both the Anti-Partition Procession Party and Swadeshi volunteers in Calcutta and

48. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, article entitled 'From Cultural to Militant Nationalism' by Niharanjan Ray, p. 12.

49. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 191.

50. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 20.

51. Home Political Conf. 1912, History Sheet of Abdur Rasul, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.



accompanied the Hindu Swadeshi leaders in most of the meetings held during 1906. In several meetings held at Beadon Square in Calcutta, during June-July, 1907, he urged his audience to become true *swadeshists* by making boycott and picketing their mottos of life, and asked his Muhammeden brethren to stand united with the Hindus.<sup>52</sup> On 23rd September, 1905, at a big meeting of the Muslims of Raja Bazar in Calcutta, with Abdul Rasul in the chair, some important resolutions were passed. In these resolutions the Muslims offered their support to the Hindus in the measures adopted by the latter for the amelioration of their country. They expressed their desire not only to join the Anti-Partition movement but also to extend their strong support to the Swadeshi cause.<sup>53</sup> At the early stages of the Anti-Partition Agitation, it was supported even by some Muslims of East Bengal. Even the Nawab of Dacca was at first inclined to stand by the Hindu Zamindars of Bengal. A muslim zamindar of Faridpur warned his co-religionists not to believe in the necessity of partition, and think that it would be beneficial to the Muslims by creating a Muslim-majority province in Eastern Bengal and Assam. Another Muslim Zamindar cordially cooperated with Aswini Kumar Dutta of Barisal. Large numbers of Muslims also took part in the Swadeshi meetings held in Calcutta and others parts of Bengal. Even in mofussil areas like Barisal, the Muslims joined the Swadeshi movement and *Bande Mataram* processions, carried *Bande Mataram* flags and attended public meetings addressed by Hindu leaders.<sup>54</sup>

But, it is true at the same time that a larger section of the Muslims supported the Partition of Bengal scheme from the very beginning.<sup>55</sup> This was quite natural, because the Partition created a Muslim-majority province where the Muslims were very likely to get various advantages, particularly well-paid administrative jobs. The Swadeshi movement affected the Muslim masses adversely by raising the prices of essential commodities like cloth, shoes and sugar. But there was no Muslim mercantile class worth the name which could take economic advantage of the 'Buy Swadeshi' slogan. The government was also

52. Home Political Conf. History Sheet No. 585, History Sheet of Liyaqat Husain, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

53. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 22.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

naturally very eager to enlist the support of the Muslims against the rising tide of nationalist agitation. Lord Curzon who initiated this policy during his visit to East Bengal in February, 1904, induced Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, by providing him with a large loan on very favourable terms, to declare himself in favour of the Partition. The Nawab became the leader of the Mahommedan opposition to the anti-Partition and boycott movements in East Bengal and Assam, and actively helped the Government in fighting the Swadeshi movement in this newly created province.<sup>56</sup> According to Government Reports, it was difficult to generalise about the Mahommedan feeling in Bengal, for there were three classes of Mahommedans, - the illiterate class or masses, the English educated class and the Maulavis or the classical Arabic-Persian scholars. There was a distinction between the patriotic feelings of the Hindus and those of the Muslims. The patriotism of the Hindus consisted in their love of their motherland, while for many Muslims, they still looked upon India as their land of adoption because they traced their descent from those who came from outside the country as conquerors. Their patriotism was extra-territorial and had its origin in a religious sentiment. According to the report of the Chief Secretary to Government of Bengal Mr. C.J. Stevenson Moore dated 28th - 29th October, 1912, there was undoubtedly a tendency among educated young Mahommedans in Calcutta towards independence of thought and action. They were no longer subservient to the recognised leaders of the Mohammedan community as they were in the past; they sought to organise agitations on Hindu lines and had even showed signs of joining the Hindus.<sup>57</sup> The illiterate Mohammedan masses, though easily swayed by religious fanaticism, were ordinarily ignorant of and indifferent to general events of political importance.<sup>58</sup>

Some critics like M.A. Buch have held the revolutionary movement in Bengal responsible for the growth of Muslim communalism. The term Muslim communalism implied the desire of the Muslims to consolidate their political position at the expense of the Hindus.<sup>59</sup> But this is not true. Anti-Hindu sentiments and Muslim communalism were

56. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

57. Home Political, Conf. File No. 290 (1-16), 1912, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

58. Home Political A, Conf. March, 1913, No. 45-55, National Archives, New Delhi.

59. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 191.



aroused much earlier by the Aligarh Movement, which was fomented by the British to some extent. Sir Sayyad Ahmed advised the Muslims to shun the Congress which was a perfectly secular organisation. It culminated in the formation of the Muslim League, a rival organisation to the Congress at Dacca on 31st December, 1906. On the other hand, we find that a few young Mohammedans founded the 'Bengal Mohammedan Association' and 'Indian Mussalman Association' in Calcutta as a counter-blast to the Muslim League of Dacca. On the other hand, the communal attitude deliberately encouraged under the leadership of the Nawab of Dacca and connived at, if not instigated by the British officials, culminated in a series of communal riots in East Bengal, the most serious of which took place at Commilla and Jamalpur (1907). The Muslim communal propaganda is best exemplified by the notorious document known as 'Lal Ishtahar' or the Red Pamphlet which was the most virulent anti-Hindu proclamation and an open incitement to violence against the Hindus.<sup>60</sup> The Muslim opposition to the Shivaji festival was due to the fact that the Muslims were not prepared to accept Indian political heroes of the past who were Hindus by religion. Wilayat Ali observed that in some Mohammedan quarters it was the general view that every movement of Hindu origin had the inevitable tendency to be detrimental to the Muslim interest. Muhammad Ali, as President of the Muslim League Session held in Madras in 1908, pointed out that the interests of the Muslims differed from those of the Hindus, and that they would suffer if they joined with the Hindus in their political agitation. It was the duty of the Muslims to look after the Muslim interests before anything else. They were all Muslims first and Indians afterwards. The Partition of Bengal and the foundation of the Muslim League (1906) undoubtedly widened the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal. As regards the question of weightage and separate electorate, the Muslim argument centered round the essential difference between the Hindus and the Muslims. Thus, owing to great differences in religious practices, social customs, and historical traditions, the interests of the two communities were regarded as vastly different from one another, and the Muslims could never safely trust the Hindus with the interest of their community.<sup>61</sup>

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60. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 113.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-240.



The reversal of the partition of Bengal, announced at Delhi in December, 1911, deeply affected the Mohammedans in two ways. They lost what had been promised to be Muslim majority province, and it appeared to them that the violent methods of the Hindu agitators had proved successful. Thus they were provided both with a grievance and with an example.<sup>62</sup> After 1910, there was a political awakening of the educated Muslim middle class, because the nationalist revolutions in Turkey and Persia made a deep impression upon the younger generation of educated Mohammedans in India. the Turko-Italian war of 1911, the Balkan wars of 1912-'13 and the course of action followed by England and Russia in Persia (the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907) revolutionised the mood of the Indian Mohammedans. In 1913, the annual conference of the Muslim League, meeting at Lucknow, adopted as its aim, the achievement of self-government in a form suited to India. The young educated Mohammedans came to realise the truth that political progress could be achieved only with the cooperation of the Hindus. Their volte face was due to a realisation of the fact that the European powers were attacking Islam and that for the safety of the Eastern peoples united defence was an urgent necessity. To them, Japan's victory over Russia (1906) meant first and foremost the defeat of a longstanding enemy of Islam, of Turkey and Persia.<sup>63</sup>

The revolutionaries of Bengal never encouraged ill feeling towards the Muslims. On this score the paridarshak (rules) of the Anushilan Samiti clearly enjoined, "In no circumstances would it be proper to show hostile feelings towards, or to deal unjustly with the Mussalmans as a nation." The Muslims of Bengal did not feel attracted to the secret societies and revolutionary activities primarily based on Hindu rites and rituals. By and large the Muslims were alienated from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement.<sup>64</sup> Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta in his book, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, wrote, that at first youths belonging to the Muslim community were accepted in their party. But, at that time, a few Muslims came forward to accept membership of the secret revolutionary societies. So, for some time Muslims were not taken as members, but soon after order was given to

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62. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, (Calcutta, 1978) p. 354.

63. Hans Kohn, *A History Of Nationalism In The East*, pp. 385-386.

64. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 68-69. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 145.

take them as members. The Muslim community was up till then, not prepared for the revolutionary movement.<sup>65</sup> Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee wrote in his book *In Search of Freedom* "We had no Muslims in the Anushilan Samiti." As a matter of fact, the Muslim community, as a whole, remained by and large unaffected by the revolutionary movement for the religious orientation of the revolutionaries was more sympathetic towards the Hindu religion than to Islam. The revolutionaries were mostly inspired by a type of Hindu nationalism.<sup>66</sup> No Muslim was admitted to the Dacca Anushilan Samiti as it was clearly enjoined in the programme of the Samiti that "None who is not a Hindu or is a hater of the Hindus shall be admitted."<sup>67</sup> The Samiti put this ban because of a section of Muslims in the Dacca town, commonly known as *kuttis* who were notorious for their hooliganism and anti-Hindu attitude, and despised by the *bhadralok* Hindus. But the Yugantar party made no such discrimination.<sup>68</sup> It should be also noted herein that the revolutionary movement was a movement of middle class youngmen and there was practically no Bengali Muslim middle class in those days. The organisers of the revolutionary societies were not anti-Muslim in their behaviour. On the contrary, during the Swadeshi movement there was a definite eagerness to enlist the support of the Muslim community. Also during the Pratapaditya festival in 1905 in Mymensingh, Anath Bandhu Guha, one of the local leaders, in his presidential address exhorted the public to celebrate the anniversary of some Muslim notables with a view to fostering brotherly feelings between the two communities. This shows that the movement was not anti-Muslim in the real sense of that term.<sup>69</sup> Aswini Kumar Ganguly said in an interview that Muslim participation in the movement was meagre, though some Muslims played important roles in the movement. Jibantara Halder said in an interview that at the initial stage of the movement there was no Muslim participation. Ganesh Ghosh, a later revolutionary, mentioned that there were some Muslim co-workers in their party in Chittagong. Sunil Das, a later revolutionary, also expressed the same

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65. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharate Dwitiya Swadhinatar Sangram*, p. 16.

66. J.C. Chatterjee, *In Search Of Freedom*, p. 57.

67. Home Political, A, Conf. F.No. 70-71, February, 1908, National Archives, New Delhi.

68. A.C. Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, pp. 250, 258.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 258, 263.



opinion that a few Muslims were recruited by their Sree Sangha party, though Muslim participation in the movement was really meagre.<sup>70</sup>

Though the revolutionary movement was, to some extent, biased towards Hindu rites and rituals,<sup>71</sup> the Revolutionaries of Bengal were not generally communal but secular in their outlook. It is important to note that Aurobindo was quite clear about the importance of evoking Muslim support in the great cause of nationalism. He wrote, "Nationalism depends for its success on the awakening and organising of the whole strength of the nation; it is therefore vitally important for nationalism that the politically backward classes should be awakened and brought into the current of political life;...the great slumbering mass of Islam which has remained politically inert throughout the last century...It is not afraid of Pan-Islamism or any signs of the growth of a separate Mohammedan self-consciousness but rather welcomes them."<sup>72</sup> The two principles advocated by Aurobindo in respect of Hindu-Muslim differences were tolerance and communal autonomy.<sup>73</sup> He was not unaware of Hindu-Muslim 'differences', generally keeping the communities apart and occasionally exploding in riots. While writing after the East Bengal communal riots in the *Bande Mataram* of 25th May, 1907, Aurobindo stressed the seriousness and true nature of the Mohammedan problem which our older politicians have always tried to belittle or ignore. The rioter, whether Hindu or Muslim, was but a disturber of the peace and force should be met by force and there could be no parleying with the engineers of communal strife. Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin* in 1910, that it would be suicidal to treat the Hindus and the Mohammedans as permanently separate units, for that must preclude the "growth of a single and individual Indian nation."<sup>74</sup> He further wrote in the *Karmayogin*, - "Hindu-Mohammedan unity cannot be affected by political adjustments or

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70. Oral Interviews taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly, Sri Jibantara Halдар, Sri Ganesh Ghosh, and Sri Sunil Das at their respective residences in Calcutta respectively on 19.4.83, 28.7.83, 4.11.82, 2.2.84.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

72. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 82-83, f.n. *Bande Mataram*, 22.12.1907, Article on 'The Awakening of Gujarat'.

73. G.N. Sharma, *The Vision of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry, 1973), p. 118.

74. Kishore Gandhi (ed.), *Contemporary Relevance of Sri Aurobindo*, essay, 'Secular and non-secular elements in Sri Aurobindo's life and thought by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, p. 134.



Congress falterings. It must be sought deeper down in the heart and the mind for where the causes of disunion are, there the remedies must be sought...we must strive to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a better mutual knowledge and sympathy. We must extend the unfaltered love of the patriot to our Mussalman brother, remembering always that in him too Narayan dwells and to him too our Mother has given permanent place in her bosom, but we must cease to approach her falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice...the Hindu will have to be taught to recognise the claims of the Mohammedans to an equal position with himself in the common life of the State in India. The Mohammedan will have to be cured of the conceit of separate interests and superior strength and recognise his own legitimate place and interests in the life of the composite Indian nation..".<sup>75</sup> He set forth the editorial policy of the paper, "we shall make it a main part of our work to place Muhammad and Islam in a new light before our readers, to spread juster views of Mohammedan history and civilization, to appreciate the Mussalman's place in our national development and the means of harmonising his communal life with our own." As early as 4th September, 1907, Aurobindo had warned against "the introduction of a Hindu-Mohammedan dualism" into the council chamber, proposed by Morley but the warning was not heeded.<sup>76</sup>

The new and advanced ideology of the Bengal Revolutionaries greatly influenced by the student community of Bengal, caught in the grip of revolution. The students popularised the message of *swadeshi* and boycott throughout the province of Bengal.<sup>77</sup> The largest number of members of the various revolutionary secret societies were students and ex-students. They were generally students of the upper and middle classes of the High English Schools and Junior College Students. The Anushilan Samiti of Dacca and Sadhana Samaj of Mymensingh admitted students below 12 for whom a special course of instruction was prescribed. The Sadhana Samaj admitted also students below 8, provided their guardians granted them permission.<sup>78</sup> The statement

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75. The Karmayogin, 1910, article entitled 'the Karmayoga' microfilmed, J. Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, N. Delhi.

76. Kishore Gandhi (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 135.

77. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 20.

78. Freedom Papers (non-conf.) An Account of Samities in Bengal (1900-08), *W. Bengal State Archives*, Calcutta.

drawn up by the Intelligence Branch, Criminal Investigation Department, Bengal, showed the participation in political agitation of students of schools and colleges in this presidency. It had been definitely established that one of the main objects of the revolutionary party was to capture the organisation of higher education in its earlier stages, more particularly the middle and high English schools - and thus introduce to the youths whose minds were well prepared for the growth of anarchical doctrines.<sup>79</sup> It was specially laid down in the rules of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti that every attempt must be made to secure the dissemination of their ideas in the Entrance Schools and Colleges, as unmarried youths were the best receptacles of enthusiasm and energy for work. The Samiti further intended to continue the movement amongst young girls in schools.<sup>80</sup> The young recruits mostly came from the middle and lower middle classes. The most effective sources of recruitment of the young boys were the schools, hostels and private messes. Thus the Sonarang National School became a model example of how teachers along with students could recruit new boys and carry on the revolutionary activities of the leading members of the Samiti. The Samiti tried to keep contact, where possible, with the drill teachers of schools, and through them boys of good physique were brought into the organization. It is on record that absconding members of the Samiti used to stay in the houses of respectable persons in different districts as private tutors where they preached revolutionary ideas among the wards. The Samiti also used famine relief and other types of social work as platforms for cadre recruitment.<sup>81</sup>

As regards women's participation in the movement, it may be remarked that in the early stages of the revolutionary movement there was no women's participation, as women were not recruited to revolutionary secret organizations. The reason for this was the great importance given to the ideal of celibacy or observance of *brahmacharya*, for the movement was, to a large extent, based on the moral ideals preached by Swami Vivekananda. Often the vow of celibacy was administered to the members of the secret societies. It can be said that

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79. Home Pol. Conf. File No.144 (1-10), 1913, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

80. Home Pol. Conf. File No. 144 (11-17), 1913, W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

81. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.). *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, articles by Saral Kumar Chatterjee, pp. 47-48.



upto 1914 there was a near total ban on the recruitment of women. But after 1914, with the increase in the number of underground workers, it was felt that some women members were needed to give shelter to the absconders. The government's secret service being well conversant with the revolutionaries' ideas about women, would not readily suspect women members of a family. Absconders were therefore to be provided with improvised family environment to divert police attention as also public suspicion.<sup>82</sup> The first women political prisoner was Nanibala Devi, and the first woman convicted prisoner was Dukaribala Devi.<sup>83</sup>

Besides, mothers and sisters of the revolutionaries also used to help them in various ways. Money was not so cheap and abundant in those days; a mother would give her son a few rupees when the latter insistently demanded it. The youngman might not disclose his real need to his mother or sister. But the latter, particularly the sister, could form a vague idea as to the purpose for which money seemed to be in such pressing demand. It was not very difficult for the mother to surmise that her son was engaged in some dangerous game. She would often be ready to afford him protection against the father's suspicion or wrath. The youngman also would unburden his mind to his sister or even to his sister-in-law who would more readily sympathise with and admire the purpose of the young desperado. Often they would even part with some of their ornaments to help the young revolutionary in his mission.<sup>84</sup>

In those days a revolver or a pistol was almost a treasure. The safe custody of a revolver or a pistol was therefore very important to a revolutionary. In many cases it was found safer and more convenient to keep the revolver with the mother or more frequently with the sister or with any young woman in a neighbour's house. The safe custody of the spoils of political dacoities often created more serious problems. Ornaments secured in dacoities had to be kept with some women relatives or sympathisers for safety. Revolutionary workers had to travel from one village to another and to tour different districts, in the course of which they had to put up in the houses of local comrades, sometimes for days together. This would not have been possible without the sympathetic

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82. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, p. 472.

83. Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

84. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 472, 474.



connivance of the mother, sister or, sister-in-law of the other revolutionary youths, as this was to be done without attracting the notice of the male head of the sheltering family. In all these matters, the women members of the family of a revolutionary worker or even those of his neighbour's family rendered real service to the cause.<sup>85</sup>

Sometimes sisters also worked as inspirers and helpmates. In this respect the elder sisters of Jatin Mukherjee and Swami Prajnanda Saraswaty stand out prominently. Sarojini Devi was the widowed elder sister of Swami Prajnanda Saraswaty. She used to take a keen interest in revolutionary activities. In his younger days Satish Mukherjee (as he was called before the initiation into *Sannyas* or asceticism) used to receive support and encouragement within the family from his elder sister, Sarojini. The members of the barisal section of the Yugantar Party used to look upon her with high regard and respect. Similarly, Jatin Mukherjee's widowed elder sister, Benodebala, used to exercise great influence over the young Jatin. She knew almost everything that Jatin was doing. She was a great source of strength and inspiration to the latter. Manorama Majumdar, the wife of Nagen Majumdar, was closely connected with some members of the Mymensingh group of the Yugantar party. She used to give shelter to revolutionary workers and also to keep revolvers in her custody. The most important case in this period of a lady suffering for keeping arms was that of Dukaribala Devi of Birbhum. She was the maternal aunt (mother's sister) of Nibaran Ghatak, an important member of the Atmonnati group of revolutionaries. She gave shelter to important absconders like Bepin Bihari Ganguly and others. She was arrested in January, 1917, with seven Mauser pistols in her custody and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment under the Arms Act. After her release, on account of the strict social conventions of these days, she was not received back into the family of her husband.<sup>86</sup>

From 1915, another type of female worker was recruited for providing shelter to absconders. Among them two names deserve particular mention, -- Nanibala and Kshiroda Sundari. In 1915, after the arrest of Ram Majumdar, it was found necessary to contact him in jail to get the whereabouts of a mauser pistol that had been previously in his

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85. *Ibid.*, pp. 474-475.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 475-476.

custody. Nanibala Devi, a widow of only twenty-six, impersonated as the wife of Ram Majumdar to secure an interview with him in jail. It was through her efforts that the pistol was made available for revolutionary work again. After this interview, she provided shelter to important absconders like Amar Chatterjee (distantly related to her), Jadugopal Mukherjee, Atul Ghosh and others --first at Rishra and then at Chandernagore -- near Calcutta. She was arrested in 1917, and brought to the Benaras Jail where she was subjected to the most inhuman tortures that could be perpetrated on a woman. She was then removed to the Presidency Jail in Calcutta as a State prisoner under Regulation III of 1818. She was the only woman State prisoner in British India till then. Nanibala was released in 1919, but was treated as a social outcast and having no place in her orthodox family she had to live alone.<sup>87</sup>

Another lady, Sindhubala Ghose, also suffered much for helping the revolutionary workers. She was the wife of Deben Ghose, a worker in charge of the Tiljala Railway cabin in an eastern suburb of Calcutta. Kshiroda Sundari of Mymensingh came into the movement in connection with giving shelter to political absconders. She first gave shelter to Surendra Mohan Ghose when he was an underground worker in his own district, Mymensingh. When Judugopal went to Mymensingh in 1916, he lived under her shelter. Subsequently she moved from place to place along with the absconders,--Kshitish Bose and his brother, Prithwish, Nagen Chakravarty, Satish Thakur and others. When almost everyone of these revolutionaries was arrested, she was sent to Benaras as if on a pilgrimage. During these hectic days, she displayed great courage and ready wit as also strong nerves. As she was never arrested by the police, she could go back to her family circle, for social conditions were somewhat more liberal in the East Bengal districts than in those of West Bengal, particularly in non-Brahmin families.<sup>88</sup>

These ladies did their best to help the revolutionaries often at great personal risk, and suffered in different ways, above all from social persecution. Most of them passed their last days virtually unknown and unhonoured. Women came more prominently into the revolutionary movement later during the thirties of the present century. During their long spells of detention and prison life, the youngmen had to undergo

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87. *Ibid.*, pp. 476-477.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 477-478.



many fasts and hunger strikes. On many occasions their letters were withheld. During the period of hunger strike, no letter was allowed to be written or received by the political prisoners. The mothers had to bear the full load of agony and anxiety. In addition to the mental agony and anxiety, the mother often had to suffer poverty and distress. Most of these youngmen came from middle and lower middle class families and were brought up and educated as the future hope and support of their respective families. Their expectation was completely belied. Yet the mothers were seldom unhelpful or unappreciative of the hazardous but noble work their sons had taken up as their duty to the motherland. If the workers of the movement had shown courage and fortitude, their mothers had shown no less.<sup>89A</sup>

Among the women who actively participated in the revolutionary movement during 1930-34, the most important names were those of Priti Wadedar, Kalpana Dutta (Joshi), Shanti Ghosh, Suniti Choudhury, Bina Das (Bhaumik), Ujjawala Majumdar, Lila Ray, Kamala Dasgupta and others.<sup>89B</sup>

Aswini Kumar Ganguly, a noted revolutionary referred to both direct and indirect participation of women in the revolutionary movement.<sup>90</sup> Jibantara Haldar, a member of the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta, said in an interview, that in his time girls were given in marriage at the tender age of 12/13 years generally. So the question of women's participation in the movement did not arise at all. Nevertheless, the women of Bengal indirectly helped the movement by facilitating correspondence, by offering shelter to absconding revolutionaries, by hiding arms and even by giving false identity and by pretending to be the wife of a revolutionary in order to save him from arrest. Thus the ladies helped the revolutionaries without arousing the suspicion of the police.<sup>91</sup> Sri Ganesh Ghosh, a veteran member of the revolutionary group at Chittagong under the leadership of Surya Sen, remarked that there was both direct and indirect women's participation in the movement in the form of carrying arms, bombs and

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89A. *Ibid.*, pp. 478-479.

89B. Dr. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 54.

90. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly at his residence in Calcutta on 19.4.1983.

91. Oral Interview taken of Sri Jibantara Haldar at his residence in Calcutta on 28.7.1983.



letters to prohibited areas.<sup>92</sup> Bina Das (Bhaumik), a renowned woman revolutionary and member of the revolutionary group led by Dr. Bhupen Bose, who joined the movement in 1928-'29, said in an interview that the women participants in the movement both directly and indirectly helped the revolutionaries by participating in violent action as well as by giving refuge, shelter and moral support to the revolutionaries. Pritilata was the first martyr among the women participants. The Muslim women, however, only offered indirect help to the revolutionaries which was none the less valuable. But there was no Muslim woman detenue or convicted prisoner.<sup>93</sup> Sri Sunil Das, a member of Sri Sangha in Dacca led by Anil Roy, stated that the Deepali Sangha, founded in 1923 by Leela Nag was a pioneer organisation in Bengal to fight for the emancipation of women from their social bondage, and became a recruiting centre of women revolutionaries in Bengal. No other revolutionary party except Sri Sangha with Deepali Sangha as its ally encouraged women to join their ranks.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, it is important and interesting to note that the Bengal revolutionaries, to a large extent, were influenced by the ideas of revolutionaries outside Bengal and India.

The revolutionary idealism of Bengal was greatly influenced by the revolutionary idealism of the leaders of Maharashtra. The new spirit that abjured the policy of prayers and petitions and stood for complete independence, extreme measures and use of force found its earliest expression in Bombay, primarily among the Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra. It was Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who gave this urge, strength and shape to the movement by organising the Ganapati and the Shivaji festivals since September, 1893, and May, 1895 respectively,<sup>95</sup> both of which were later adopted by the Bengal revolutionaries and celebrated in Bengal with great vigour. The revolutionary movement in Bengal which aimed at ousting the British out of India by the use of force, received a powerful impetus in 1906, when a party of Maratha agitators from Bombay and the Central Province including B.G. Tilak of Poona

92. Oral Interview taken of Sri Ganesh Ghosh at his residence in Calcutta on 4.11.82.

93. Oral Interview taken of Smt. Bina Bhowmik at her residence in Calcutta on 2.7.83.

94. Oral Interview taken of Sri Sunil Das at his residence in Calcutta on 2.2.1984.

95. A.C. Bose, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

and his friend G.S. Khaparde of Amraoti came to Calcutta and held a Shivaji festival and exhibition on 4th, 5th and 6th June. This was the first attempt made to introduce this festival amongst the Bengalis.<sup>96</sup> Tilak also openly extolled the heroism of the Bengal revolutionaries after the Muzaffarpur bomb outrage (April, 1908), and for this he was charged with sedition and sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment and deportation to the Mandalay Jail. But Tilak and his followers were socially more conservative than the Bengal Revolutionaries, as clearly illustrated by the activities of the Chapekar brothers of Maharashtra.<sup>97</sup>

The militant nationalist movement in Bengal became a two-faced movement. While one face eagerly looked back to the much-extolled superiority of India's antique culture and traditional values and the achievements of their forefathers, the other keenly studied the international situation and the national movements abroad for hope, encouragement, moral support and useful lessons to be learnt and utilized in the Indian context. The lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi supplied them with mental pabulum.<sup>98</sup> The very ideas of the bomb and the secret society and of propaganda through action and sacrifice were imported from the West; so were the beliefs that an unpopular and despotic administration could be paralysed by individual acts of terrorism, that some princely states might be persuaded to play the role of Sardinia - Piedmont in Indian history, that the Indian soldiers, the mainstay of the British rule in India, could be incited and like Garibaldi's volunteers led against their foreign master, and that someone might, like Cavour, secure foreign help in money and arms for overthrowing British rule in India.<sup>99</sup>

The Bengal revolutionaries were, to a large extent, influenced by the Italian Risorgimento, by the Nihilist movement in Russia and by the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland. Many of their political and economic ideas were borrowed from these European revolutionaries.

The biographies of Parnell of Ireland and of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Kossuth of Italy were translated and studied avidly by the Bengal

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96. J.C. Ker, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 55, 140-141.

97. Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt (ed.) *Sedition Committee Report*, pp. 1-4.

98. A.C. Bose, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8, f.n. Sir Lawrence Jenkins, Chief Justice of Bengal, quoted in R.G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle for Swaraj*, pp. 88-89.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 8.



revolutionaries who wanted to follow their example.<sup>100</sup> Just as Mazzini's movement was a persistent uprising against the foreigner, a struggle for national unity and free institutions and partly also a revolt against the existing social order,<sup>101</sup> the revolutionary movement in Bengal was a struggle for freedom and for promoting national consciousness among the Indians. Mazzini regarded liberty as a necessary right which every individual should fight for at all risks against whatsoever power should seek to withhold or deny it.<sup>102</sup> So also the Bengal revolutionaries declared that liberty was the inalienable birth-right of the nation which must be acquired at any cost. But they went a step further and equated freedom with God. Mazzini's aim was to free Italy from the chains of slavery and bondage imposed by Austria, and to acquire independence in every aspect of life for every individual.<sup>103</sup> Cavour also wanted liberty in all fields,--economic, political and religious.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the Bengal revolutionaries aimed at complete independence in every aspect of life for India. They wanted to replace the alien British rule by a national government. They preached the ideal of *Purna Swaraj* which meant the freest and completest self-expression of the highest self not of an individual only, but of the nation as a whole.

The Bengal revolutionaries, following Mazzini, also realized the importance of adopting the methods of guerilla warfare for it was not possible for a dependent and subordinate nation to organise a permanent trained army. Mazzini further emphasized the need to collect arms as one of the important duties of the members of the 'Young Italy' Society.<sup>105</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries likewise felt the urgent need of creating a revolutionary spirit in the country at large so that the people would be ready to strike at the opportune moment. Military training and collection of arms in secret were important items in their agenda of revolutionary work. But Barindra Kumar Ghosh and his associates placed terrorism instead of armed uprising of the people in the

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100. Hans Kohn, *Op. Cit.*, p. 371.

101. G.F.H. Berkeley, *Italy in the Making*, Vol. I, (Cambridge, 1932), p. 9.

102. Giuseppe Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (London, 1867), p. 307.

103. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhushan, *Italir Itibritta Sambalita Mazzinir Jeebanbritta*, (Calcutta, 1286, B.E.) pp. 4, 121.

104. Massimo Salvadori, *Cavour and the Unification of Italy*, (Princeton, 1961), p. 149.

105. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhushan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 79, 163.



forefront of the revolutionary programme in Bengal. The manufacture of bombs, political dacoity for the raising of funds and murder of government officials were undertaken in order to paralyse the administration by striking terror into the heart of the British Government. In this respect the method pursued by the Bengal revolutionaries was different from that of the members of the Young Italy society. They were only similar to the extent that both aimed at bringing about an armed revolution in their respective countries. On the other hand, Garibaldi roused the people to a pitch of fighting spirit hitherto unknown and became the living personification of the great fight for liberty in the eyes of the world.<sup>106</sup> Like the members of the secret societies in Bengal such as the Anushilan Samiti, the members of 'Young Italy' Society had to pledge themselves to sacrifice their lives for securing Italy's independence from internal and external domination. Mazzini was the first to take this oath.<sup>107</sup> Mazzini felt that the cause of freedom demanded self-sacrifice.<sup>108</sup> Besides, every member of the Young Italy Society had to take an oath in the name of God at the time of initiation. Mazzini also employed a large number of spies to collect information regarding the activities of the alien Government and political leaders.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, many of the Bengal revolutionaries who worked in Government offices and held high posts used to collect important information regarding government activities, and thereby helped the revolutionary work indirectly. Every member of the Young Italy Society was to have a pseudonym, a dagger, a gun and 50 cartridges. The signs and passwords were different in each province and were altered every three months.<sup>110</sup> Likewise the Bengal revolutionaries also maintained absolute secrecy in all their activities. The members of the Anushilan Samiti as well as other similar societies in Bengal had to take an oath in the name of God and of the motherland to maintain strict secrecy and not to disclose anything about their society or their secret work to others. Quite naturally, no regular records of their secret activities were maintained anywhere. Even no diaries were preserved by the revolutionary leaders in their own

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106. Rupert Sargent Holland, *Builders of United Italy*, New York, 1908, pp. 281-282.

107. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhusan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 82.

108. R.S. Holland, *Op. Cit.*, p. 224.

109. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhusan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 167-168, 385.

110. G.F.H. Berkeley, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 17.

interests. This absence of contemporary authentic records later gave rise to many claims and counter-claims by different revolutionary groups which cannot be easily settled to-day on the basis of written evidence.

The 'Giovine Italia' founded by Mazzini whose secret branches were established in all the chief towns of Italy<sup>111</sup> may be compared to the Anushilan Samiti in Calcutta which later established its branches in different parts of Bengal. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti also had many branches in different districts of Bengal. Some of these outwardly appeared as physical culture centres, but really speaking, they were centres of secret terrorist activities. Members of the inner circle of these societies often worked under different assumed names, and they were not always known to other members of the same group, particularly those belonging to the outer circle. The revolutionary movement in Bengal could not be centralised because it followed the example of the Carbonari Society.<sup>112</sup> As regards the pattern of organisation of the Young Italy society, there were a central organisation and provincial organisations for every region. The mode of work of these organisations was similar to that of the Anushilan Samiti in Bengal.<sup>113</sup> The main aim of the Italian Revolution was to bring about a national unity, and to this end Mazzini, through the Young Italy society, sought to initiate the common people in the main principles of democracy.<sup>114</sup> Some of the leaders of the Bengal revolutionaries also talked of enlisting mass support for their movement; but they did not think in concrete terms about the future form of their country's government or the future pattern of their society. Mazzini was frankly in favour of a republican democratic government for Italy,<sup>115</sup> but the Bengal revolutionaries were mentally undecided on this very important question at least in the beginning. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta tells us that the leaders of the revolutionary camp often equivocated on this question. They were not very clear in their minds as to what sort of government they would like to set up after the country's liberation from the foreign yoke.<sup>116</sup> As regards the importance of foreign aid and assistance for

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111. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

112. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.

113. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhusan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 165.

114. *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 100.

115. Guiseppe Mazzini, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 19-20.

116. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 29-30.



the purpose of achieving the country's freedom, while the Bengal revolutionaries felt the urgent need of seeking foreign help and assistance, the Italian leaders were not of the same opinion. The Young Italy Society believed that if the revolutionary movement depended on foreign help, then it would be controlled by external events, and in such a case victory would be uncertain. A strong sense of nationalism also could not be developed if the success of the revolutionary movement was sought with foreign help.<sup>117</sup> Mazzini was not in favour of seeking foreign help in the cause of the country for he had a strong faith in the Italian masses and believed that Italy could achieve her own liberation.<sup>118</sup> He founded the Giovine Europa or Young Europe Committee at Berne on April 19th, 1834, to help the revolutionists abroad.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, Cavour felt that foreign aid was essential to ultimate victory and looked to France as the most probable ally.<sup>120</sup> Most of the Bengal Revolutionaries, however, believed that foreign aid was necessary in their struggle for freedom from the British rule. Some of them went abroad to seek foreign help in the shape of money and arms, and also set up revolutionary societies to work from abroad. During the First World War they actually received some help from the German Government, though it did not enable them to achieve their object.

As regards the ideal of universal brotherhood and the highest good of the whole world, B.C. Pal and Aurobindo preached the ideal that India must be free not only for herself but for the benefit of the entire mankind. They believed like Swami Vivekananda that India had a message to give to the World, and that this message could be properly communicated only if India was liberated from foreign domination. Mazzini's ideal of brotherhood of nations was however, limited to Europe and did not embrace the entire world.<sup>121</sup> But, just like the Bengal revolutionaries, Mazzini preached his political ideas as a semi-religious creed. He called his cult "a patriotic religion",<sup>122</sup> equated the ideal of freedom with God<sup>123</sup> and held up freedom struggle as a

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117. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhusan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 78.

118. Massimo Salvadari, *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

119. G.F.H. Berkeley, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 15, 246.

120. R.S. Holland, *Op. Cit.*, p. 184.

121. G.F.H. Berkeley, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 15, 18.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 11.



God-given mission and therefore a sacred duty on the part of the people of the country. The watchword of Mazzini's Young Italy was "God and people..."<sup>124</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries, as we have already noted, based their political ideas on the Hindu religion and Hindu philosophy in order to popularise them. They preached the idea of the divinity of the motherland and depicted their country as the Divine Mother, bound by fetters, who must be freed by Her sons. They even propagated the idea that it was their God-ordained duty to fight for the freedom of their motherland by sacrificing everything including their lives. The idea was first given a very strong expression in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's famous novel *Anandamath* (1882). The revolutionaries adopted the slogan 'Bande Mataram' (Hail Mother) as some sort of a sacred *mantra* (religious formula) and even went to the gallows chanting this slogan.

There was one great difference between the Bengal revolutionaries and the revolutionary group in Italy to which Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta has drawn our attention.<sup>125</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries preached the ideas of *swadeshi* or use of home-made goods, self-help and self-reliance. In this respect their ideas were similar to those of Mazzini and Cavour who also believed in self-dependence through the establishment and development of indigenous farms and factories, thereby increasing the production of the country to put an end to poverty.<sup>126</sup> But Mazzini and Cavour went a step further. While Cavour stood for free economy based on the free use of the means of production,<sup>127</sup> Mazzini preached the ideas of union between labour and capital and equal distribution of the profits of labour among the labourers. Mazzini thus envisaged a socialistic pattern of society and emphasized upon the emancipation of the working man as well as the women. Like the Bengal Revolutionaries Mazzini, however, realized the importance of social service and made it an item in the programmes of the Young Italy Society.<sup>128</sup> Just as the Bengal Revolutionaries realised the importance of national education, so also Mazzini felt that national education was essential for the renaissance of Italy. He sought to realize his object

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124. R.S. Holland, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 132-133.

125. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 48-49.

126. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhusan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45, Massimo Salvadari, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.

127. Massimo Salvadari, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.

128. Guiseppe Mazzini, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 349, 355, 378.

by means of establishing public libraries and universities in different parts of the country so that every Italian might receive at least some education.<sup>129</sup> Though priests, professional people, businessmen and some of the nobles joined the new movement started by Mazzini,<sup>130</sup> his appeal was mainly addressed to the Italian youth, and his society accepted as its member no one above 40 years of age. But the Italian peasantry never clearly understood the idea of one Italian nation, and therefore most of them wanted to be left alone.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, in the Bengal revolutionary movement we find that the peasantry remained outside its orbit. It was rather a movement of the middle class educated intelligentsia, in which students of schools and colleges constituted the backbone, and mostly young men below 30 took part in terrorist actions.

The Bengal Revolutionary movement may also be compared with the Nihilist or Narodnic Movement, a phase of the Populist movement in Russia, which took place in the middle of the 19th century during the great social and intellectual ferment which followed the death of Tsar Nicholas I and the defeat and humiliation of the Crimean War.<sup>132</sup> The young Nihilists were revolutionaries by precept and by practice, and had an unshakable faith in revolution. They were in all things aggressive. According to them, the first step towards reform was to destroy the whole existing system.<sup>133</sup> The Nihilists looked upon the government and the social structure of their country as a moral and political monstrosity,-- obsolete, barbarous, stupid and odious, and dedicated their lives to its total destruction. Their faith in revolution was a consequence of the disillusionment with parliamentary democracy and the good faith of bourgeois intellectuals that resulted from the fiasco of the European revolutions of 1848-49.<sup>134</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries likewise believed in armed revolution to overthrow the British rule, and like the Nihilists they were also disillusioned with the policy of prayer and petition followed by the Moderates. The first condition of

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129. Yogendranath Bandyopadhyay Vidyabhusan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 128.

130. R.S. Holland, *Op. Cit.*, p. 136.

131. G.F.H. Berkeley, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 5, 16, 242.

132. Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, first published in Italy in 1952 under the title, 'Il Populismo Russo', English translation, (G. Britain, 1960), preface & p. 7.

133. E.H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles* (Harmondsworth, Middle-sex, 1949), p. 299.

134. Franco Venturi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 8, 18.



membership to the Nihilist (or, Populist) Movement was the sacrifice of one's entire life to the movement, both to the particular group and party and to the cause of the revolution in general.<sup>135</sup> The first revolutionary secret society formed by Ishutin, a student of the Moscow University, in 1865, contained a secret cell called 'Hell' whose members pledged themselves to die fighting for the cause.<sup>136</sup> Likewise the Bengal revolutionaries also preached the ideal of self-sacrifice and selfless dedication to the national cause, and the members of the secret samitis in Bengal had to take an oath to sacrifice everything dear to them including their own lives, if necessary. There is also much similarity between the Nihilists and the Bengal revolutionaries with regard to their courage, programme of murdering oppressive royal servants, secret organization and so on. Specially, Bengal's cult of bombs was borrowed from them.<sup>137</sup> Like the secret societies of the Nihilists, the Dacca Anushilan Samiti also had an inner circle comprising a few chosen members whose work included secret assassination and anything (however unscrupulous that might be) calculated to achieve the ultimate object.<sup>138</sup> The economic ideas of the Nihilists were, to a large extent, similar to those of the Bengal revolutionaries. Exploitation and misery had long been the most familiar and universally recognised characteristics of Russian social life, the principle victims of the system being the peasants, both serfs and free. The Nihilists were determined to remedy the grievances of these agricultural workers and aimed at achieving social justice and social equality.<sup>139</sup> In Bengal also we find that the revolutionaries sought to put an end to the economic exploitation of the common people by the British Government and the abject poverty which threatened to sap the vitality of the nation by means of economic boycott and *swadeshi* or the use of home-made goods in order to make the people self-dependent and self-sufficient. Though such ideas of boycott and *swadeshi* are absent in Russia, the Nihilists established as an economic measure, the 'Land and Liberty' organisation in 1876, with the object of distributing land among the peasants and giving full liberty to the people to choose their government.<sup>140</sup> The Nihilists believed in

135. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

136. David Footman, *The Russian Revolutions*, (London, 1962), p. 35.

137. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

138. Home Dept. Political, Conf. A. February, 1908, File No. 70-71, Report regarding Anusilan Samiti Society establish in Dacca District.

139. Franco Venturi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

140. David Footman, *Op. Cit.*, p. 38.



the emancipation of the person i.e., the formation of independent characters who can think critically, by the diffusion of technical and scientific knowledge.<sup>141</sup> Sunday schools were started by students and intellectuals to teach the illiterates.<sup>142</sup> Though the beneficence of education was an article of the Nihilist creed,<sup>143</sup> they never thought in terms of national education by means of setting up national schools and national colleges as envisaged by the Bengal revolutionaries. Their ideas were similar to the extent that the Bengal revolutionaries also set up night schools and working men's institutes to provide education to the working men. In respect of religious ideas, the Nihilists, with a few exceptions, were all atheists,<sup>144</sup> whereas the Bengal revolutionaries were very often religious-minded and blended their political ideas with religion. Their ideology, as a whole, was Hindu-oriented, for they often cited examples from Hindu Scriptures and other holy texts to emphasize their point of view. They were in some cases, initiated to the revolutionary creed in front of an image of Goddess Kali, and members of the secret societies were given lessons in the basic tenets of Hindu religion. Both the Nihilists and the Bengal revolutionaries adopted terrorism as one of their main tactics to achieve their aim, but while the Bengal revolutionaries advocated both passive resistance and terrorism as equally important means to their end, to be applicable as the situation demanded, the Russian Nihilists were out and out terrorists who called for a bloody and merciless revolution to exterminate the imperial family, traitors and hostile officials and ultimately condemned Czar Alexander II to death.<sup>145</sup> It is, however, important to note that not all Bengal revolutionaries supported and believed in terrorism as an effective means to achieve freedom. Finally, there was much similarity with regard to students' participation and youth participation in the two movements in Bengal and Russia. The Nihilist movement was dominated by the young who were mostly sons and daughters of poor gentry, minor officials and priests (or the lower clergy). Many of them were school students and were very young in age, while most of them were undergraduate university students, and some were touched by

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141. Franco Venturi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 327.

142. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

143. Ronald Hingley, *Nihilists : Russian Radicals and Revolutionaries in the reign of Alexander II*, (London, 1967), p. 26.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

145. Ronald Hingley, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 51-52, David Footman, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 39-40, 44.

higher education. Many of them had worked as school masters before exchanging chalks and blackboards for revolvers or explosives.<sup>146</sup> In all these respects the Nihilists were similar to the Bengal revolutionaries. But, while the disillusioned educated middle class intelligentsia participated in both the movements, in the case of the Nihilist movement, the Russian girls often became more whole-heartedly Nihilist than the youngmen. For example, Sophia Perovsky, a school mistress, led the victorious Nihilist bomb squad against the Emperor.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, woman's active participation in the revolutionary movement in Bengal was almost nil except towards the fag end of the movement, in the later years, when some women took an active part in it. While the Nihilists came from poor families, the Bengal revolutionaries came from well-to-do or middle class families and many of them were sons of lawyers, doctors, educationists, businessmen, and even landlords. Both the movements lacked mass support and mass participation. The Nihilists failed to come into rapport with the Russian peasants who were for the most part suspicious of them.<sup>148</sup> While the Nihilists believed in the emancipation of the peasants and fought for the peasants, the Bengal revolutionaries did not have any strong feeling for the Indian peasants or the Indian mass. The Bengal revolutionaries also did not make any attempt to explain their ideology to the toiling masses and to make their movement acceptable to the latter. While the Nihilist movement was not a single or organised movement, because the Nihilists could not agree among themselves as to how to get rid of the Tsarist autocracy,<sup>149</sup> the revolutionary movement in Bengal was, broadly speaking, a single movement. Though on the question of terrorism there was a divergence of opinion among the revolutionaries, all were in favour of an armed revolution. However, it may be remarked that in both Russia and Bengal, official harshness and government repression inevitably provoked revolutionary violence.

Finally, the revolutionary movement in Bengal had much similarity with the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland. Sinn Fein was an expression, in political theory and action, of the claim of Ireland to be a nation, with all the practical consequences which such a claim involved.<sup>150</sup> As a

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146. Ronald Hingley, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 16, 25-26, 52.

147. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 32.

148. David Footman, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

150. Robert Mitchell Henry, *The Evolution of Sinn Fein*, (Dublin, Talbot n.d.), p. 50.



political organisation, the association known as Sinn Fein (Ourselves Alone) had first taken shape in 1905.<sup>151</sup> In respect of political ideals, the Sinn Feiners and the Bengal revolutionaries stood close to one another. Patrick H. Pearse defined the object of the Sinn Fein movement as to break all connections with England and to achieve the independence of Ireland. Like the revolutionaries of Bengal, the Sinn Feiners aimed at putting an end to English misgovernment,<sup>152</sup> and Parnell claimed that freedom of the country was an inherent right of the nation.<sup>153</sup> The object of the Irish national leaders like Wolfe, Tone, Thomas David, James Fintan Lalor, John Mitchell and Charles Stewart Parnell was to achieve the absolute independence of Ireland.<sup>154</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries likewise preached absolute freedom from British rule. The Sinn Feiners also preached the ideals of self-sacrifice, active and passive resistance as well as terrorism like the Bengal revolutionaries. In a proclamation posted outside the General Post Office by the Sinn Feiners the latter declared that they pledged their lives to the cause of freedom.<sup>155</sup> The policy of the Sinn Fein organisation was to paralyse the organs of government and to supersede them by a system based upon terror.<sup>156</sup> Like the terrorist activities of the Bengal Revolutionaries, the Sinn Feiners' activities comprised of murders, assaults, highway robberies, arson and attempt to wreck trains.<sup>157</sup> The Sinn Feiners justified the use of force in achieving the country's freedom.<sup>158</sup> Pearse advocated the practice of arms and protest in blood as necessary to achieve their aim.<sup>159</sup> The Sinn Feiners held that only an armed people could bargain for freeman's terms.<sup>160</sup> Like the Bengal Revolutionaries the leaders of the Sinn Fein movement aimed at making the English Government in Ireland impossible by an organised system of passive resistance to and boycott of the British rule.<sup>161</sup> The Sinn Feiners also

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151. Walter Alison Phillips, *The Revolution in Ireland*, (London, 1923), p. 53.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 64, 136.

153. Robert Mitchell Henry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

154. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

155. Mary Louisa Norway (Gadsden), *the Sinn Fein Rebellion as I saw it*, London, 1916, p. 105.

156. W. Alison Phillips, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

157. Robert Mitchell Henry, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 167-171.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

159. Aodh de Blacam, *What Sinn Fein Stands For*, (Dublin, 1921), pp. 57-59.

160. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

161. Daniel Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, (Dublin, Talbot, n.d.), pp. 114-116.



insisted on the need of cultivating in the Irish people the spirit of self-reliance and self-dependence by the establishment and development of native industries and native manufacture, meted out justice through courts set up by them known as the Sinn Fein Courts, and sought to revive the Irish (Gaelic) language and Irish learning and culture. They also preached social and economic boycott, as was evident from the instructions issued by Cumann na ban, a quasi-military Sinn Fein Women's organisation, (not to be in company of nor speak to a policeman, nor even to occupy the same bench with the latter in the Church),<sup>162</sup> and from the resolutions passed by Sinn Feiners in favour of boycotting articles of common consumption from which the British Exchequer derived its chief revenues.<sup>163</sup> The militant nationalists of Bengal were quick to realise the utility and power of these ideas in the Indian context, and made great use of them in the anti-partition movement.<sup>164</sup> Following the ideas of Parnell, Aurobindo sought to make administration impossible by an organised passive resistance.<sup>165</sup> Sinn Fein clubs sprang up in every parish of Ireland to give physical and intellectual training to the young,<sup>166</sup> like the *samitis* and *akhras* in Bengal. The Sinn Feiners also believed in the efficacy of foreign aid and assistance in the cause of freedom. Like the Bengal Revolutionaries they set up organisations abroad in the U.S.A., and established contacts with Germany.<sup>167</sup> In respect of religious ideas, it may be noted that the Sinn Fein movement had coincided with a profound religious movement in Ireland, and the moral element was its most significant element. The protagonists of the movement revived the old world faith<sup>168</sup> and invoked the blessings of the 'Most High God' in their cause.<sup>169</sup> Pearse laid stress more upon the spiritual than upon the material side of Irish independence. He held that to secure spiritual independence material freedom was necessary, and that such freedom could only be found in political independence. To betray patriotism was a moral sin.<sup>170</sup> The Sinn Feiners, like the Bengal revolutionaries,

162. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

163. W. Alison Phillips, *Op. Cit.*, p. 33.

164. G.N. Sharma (ed.), *The Vision of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry, 1973, an article entitled 'Sri Aurobindo' and the National Movement', by V.S. Joshi, p. 55.

165. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 69.

166. Daniel Breen, *Op. Cit.* pp. 30-31.

167. W. Alison Phillips, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117, 137.

168. A de Blacam, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 225-244.

169. Mary Louisa Norway, *Op. Cit.*, p. 106.

170. Robert Mitchell Henry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 208, A de Blacam, *Op. Cit.*, p. 61.

preached that by the law of God, the people of Ireland had a right to be free.<sup>171</sup> As regards education, both the Sinn Feiners and the Bengal revolutionaries realised the need of evoking a system of national education. The Sinn Fein proposed to arrest the anglicization of Ireland by introducing a new system of education on national lines which would train up young Irish men and women imbued with a national spirit and national pride.<sup>172</sup> The Gaelic League was established in 1893 for this purpose and to remind the new generation of the nation's past.<sup>173</sup> In respect of social ideas, we find a dis-similarity between the Sinn Feiners and the Bengal revolutionaries. While the Bengal revolutionaries preached the ideal of social service which included relief work, serving the poor, the sick and the distressed and work of public utility, the Sinn Feiners went a step further and thought in terms of social democracy, and held that the national cause was both a social and a political cause. Both Pearse and James Connolly as early as 1908 preached social as well as national regeneration which resembled closely the Soviet model.<sup>174</sup> There was a touch of Marxism in their ideas, and they seemed to be influenced by the Bolshevik movement. But, in the case of Bengal, it was only after the success of the Russian Revolution of November 1917, that the Bengal revolutionaries began to read Marxist literature seriously. Though, while in America, during the First World War, M.N. Roy studied Marx and other socialist writers and became a Marxist, his case was rather an exception. The Bengal revolutionaries at large, did not cherish any clear-cut idea about the form of government to be established after gaining independence of the country, though B.C. Pal wanted to represent the forces of democracy,<sup>175</sup> and Aurobindo advocated responsible, constitutional and popular system of government for India.<sup>176</sup> But the Fenian movement, as it was called, was avowedly republican and separatist from the very beginning. The Sinn Feiners aimed at establishing a republic.<sup>177</sup> Finally, neither the Sinn Fein nor the Bengal revolutionary movement could become a mass movement. There was plentiful evidence that the Sinn Fein gospel of hate made

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171. Robert Mitchell Henry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

172. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

173. A de Blacam, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 38-41.

174. *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 186-187.

175. A.P. Mookherjee, *Social and Political Ideas of B.C. Pal*, p. 62.

176. Kishore Gandhi (ed.), *Contemporary Relevance of Sri Aurobindo*, essay entitled 'Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo', by V.P. Sharma, p. 61.

177. Robert Mitchell Henry, *Op. Cit.*, p. 34.



little appeal to the people at large.<sup>178</sup> The Sinn Fein's members were recruited mainly from the ranks of young intellectuals, young teachers, poets and journalists.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, the revolutionary movement in Bengal was a movement of the educated middle-class intelligentsia or the *bhadralok* class. While the Sinn Feiners openly called for participation by both men and women in the movement,<sup>180</sup> during the first phase of the revolutionary movement in Bengal, there was not much of women's participation in it. Moreover, it was an underground movement and its protagonists did not call for women's participation. There were, of course, a few exceptions like Sarala Devi (Ghosal) who was a driving force behind the development of *Samitis* and *akhiras* for physical training in Calcutta and elsewhere. It will not be entirely out of place here to refer briefly to the foreign contacts made by the Bengal Revolutionaries.

Taking advantage of the outbreak of World War I, the Bengal revolutionaries namely Jatindranath Mukherjee, Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, Motilal Roy and others made elaborate arrangements for an armed uprising in this country with German help and support. The Revolutionaries opened a company named Harry and Sons in Calcutta to bring foreign money from Germany to India through the channel of this company. For this purpose Narendranath and Abani Mukherjee went to Bangkok and China to request the German Consul General in Shanghai to send arms and money.<sup>181</sup> The first instalment of German money, however, reached India not before June, 1915.<sup>182</sup> By early 1915, Indian revolutionaries in Germany formally organised themselves into an Indian Independence Committee with headquarters in Berlin. It was an autonomous body which regularly received a specified monthly amount from the German Foreign office, and Bhupendranath Dutta, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda, was its secretary. Many senior leaders like Taraknath Das, Jitendranath Lahiri and Birendranath Dasgupta also came over to Germany from the U.S.A. But, by the end of 1916, this Committee lost its influence on the

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178. W. Alison Phillips, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

179. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 61.

180. W. Alison Phillips, *Op. Cit.*, p. 167.

181. Motilal Roy, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 122, 140.

182. A.C. Bose, *Op. Cit.*, p. 88, f.n. Statement of Hari Kumar Chakravarty and Atul Krishna Ghosh.



German Government.<sup>183</sup> The Sedition Committee's Report stated that the Germans asked the Bengal revolutionaries to send an agent to Batavia to co-operate and discuss plans with the Germans there. Naren Bhattacharya (later known as M.N. Roy) was accordingly sent to Batavia, and according to the Sedition Committee's Report, on his arrival there he met Theodore Helfferich, the German Consul General. He urged that the German ship, with the cargo of arms and ammunition on its way to Karachi to assist the Indian revolutionaries should be diverted to Bengal, and this was eventually agreed to.<sup>184</sup> It was further planned in Berlin that the German weapons would be received in three places on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, namely Hatia, Raimangal and Balasore in Orissa. But the entire scheme failed because of premature disclosure made by a Chinese national sent to Helfferich at Batavia and by a Bengali in Siam named Sukumar Chatterjee.<sup>185</sup> Thus, neither the Berlin Committee nor its branch in America was able to send any substantial assistance to the revolutionaries in India.<sup>186</sup> The Bengal revolutionaries also visited other European countries to secure military and financial support for their cause. For example, Hem Chandra Das (Kanungo) of the Yugantar group went to Paris in 1906 for training in explosives and bomb-making; Taraknath Das and many others went to the U.S.A.; and Surendramohan Bose and Abani Mukherjee (of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti) and Rashbehari Bose went to Japan in 1906 and 1915 respectively.<sup>187</sup> But, nothing substantial in respect of foreign help could be gained. The revolutionaries in India failed to utilize properly whatever foreign support in money and arms was available, due to interception by the British authority.

In America, Lala Hardayal of the Punjab started a newspaper called the *Ghadr*, which meant revolt with the ostensible object of preaching sedition against the British. This paper, printed in Gurmukhi and Urdu, as the Sedition Committee found, was of violent anti-British nature.<sup>188</sup> Just before the World War I broke out, the Ghadr leaders in America decided to send their men home in batches to win over the

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183. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

184. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 167-170.

185. A.C. Guha, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 466-469.

186. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 174.

187. A.C. Bose, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 18, 48, 67, 146.

188. Freedom Papers, non-conf. Bengali revolutionaries abroad (1900-20), W. Bengal State Archives. Calcutta.

Indian soldiers and to organise revolt. In 1915, close contact was established between the returning Ghadarites and the revolutionaries led by Rashbehari Bose, and it was planned that the soldiers in the major cantonments of the Punjab and U.P. would rise in revolt simultaneously. The plan, in fact, covered the whole of northern and eastern India. But the plan was not successful as the British intelligence came to know of it soon. But it is significant to note that Rashbehari was the leader of this planned revolt. The Ghadr members in the U.S.A. were also engaged in smuggling arms to India. A substantial part of the arms used by the revolutionaries in India actually came from the U.S.A. and Canada.<sup>189</sup> It was Hardayal who induced the German Government, after the declaration of the World War I, to send arms and ammunitions in *Maverick*, an oil tanker, to Java, an route to a port in India with Ghadr partymen as guides, for the purpose of supporting revolutionary activities in India. An offshoot of the Ghadr propaganda and activities of the Ghadrites was the Komagata Maru incident of 1915 and the suffering of the Sikhs at the hands of the Canadian and Calcutta authorities were all attributed to the vindictive policy of the British Government.<sup>190</sup>

However, the idea of achieving India's political liberation with foreign support lingered and later it found expression through the INA movement of Subhas Chandra Bose. There was nothing unnatural about it. The American revolutionaries also received foreign assistance in overthrowing the British rule. So did the Italians in their attempt to overthrow the Austrian yoke.

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189. A.C. Bose, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 121, 125-126.

190. Freedom Papers; Non-conf. Bengali revolutionaries abroad (1900-20), W. Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

**CONCLUSION : IMPACT OF THE  
REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT  
ON INDIAN POLITICS**



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The revolutionary or militant nationalist movement in Bengal may justly claim a prominent place in the history of India's Freedom Struggle. As Dr. R.C. Majumdar has rightly observed, in a period when political work was looked upon by most educated Indians as a pastime for leisure hours, the Militant Nationalists set an example of devoting their whole time and energy to the service of the motherland in a spirit of true dedication and sacrifice. This is specially praiseworthy because the revolutionaries did not work in the limelight, and had no hope for fame or reward or even immediate appreciation by the public. They were inspired solely by the idea of liberating their motherland from the foreign yoke, and voluntarily gave up the prospect of peaceful domestic life and successful career for a life of sacrifice and suffering, of imprisonment, inhuman torture and death.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to put priority to sacrifice and suffering for the national cause was a quality of life, inculcated by the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

One of the main contributions of the cult of militant nationalism was the shedding of the fear of the British Government and all its instruments of repression, including the prison and the gallows. Mahatma Gandhi himself admitted in 1908 that, "the real awakening took place after the Partition of Bengal... After the partition people saw that petitions must be backed up by force, and that they must be capable of suffering. This new spirit must be considered to be the chief result of the

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1. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, preface.
  2. Oral Interview taken of Sri Sunil Das at his residence in Calcutta on 2.2.84.

Partition. That spirit was seen in the outspoken writings in the press. That which the people said tremblingly and in secret began to be said and to be written publicly. People, young and old, used to run away at the sight of an English face; it now no longer awes them.”<sup>3</sup> By defiance of death with reckless abandon the revolutionary martyrs helped to banish the fear of the British Raj from the minds of the people to an appreciable extent. This quality of fearlessness, bequeathed to the nation by the martyrs, paved the road to freedom.<sup>4</sup> For the first time in the political history of India, the Revolutionaries of Bengal through their ideology and Revolutionary activities generated a strong anti-British feeling among the people, particularly the youth of Bengal as well as of India. This was certainly no small achievement of the revolutionary movement in the face of strong opposition from and severe repression and oppression practised by the British Government on its Indian subjects.

It is true that the revolutionary movement in Bengal by itself could not achieve its goal i.e., the political freedom of India. Yet one cannot deny its contributions to the cause of freedom and to the final victory of the Indian people over the alien government. The value of a movement should be judged by its achievements rather than by its shortcomings. The movement spread its tentacles not only in different parts of India but also abroad, such as in distant parts of Asia, Europe and America. The skill and ingenuity displayed in creating and maintaining this far-flung network of revolutionary organisations deserves our admiration. The large number of revolutionaries who chose a life of hardship and exile (either for many years or for life) away from their motherland, rendered yeomen’s service to the cause of India’s freedom by propagating true facts about the real nature of the British rule in India to the people of those countries who had so long been misled by the false propaganda of the British, and succeeded in evoking sympathy and enlisting support for India in her struggle for freedom. The political concessions made by the British Government to their Indian subjects during this period (1902-’19) were perhaps due more to the revolutionary movement than to the constitutional agitation for political concessions, launched by the Congress.<sup>5</sup>

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3. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 131.

4. Oral Interview taken of Sri Sunil Das, *Op. Cit.*

5. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, preface.



The depth and sincerity of the feelings which animated the spirit of Militant Nationalism in Bengal during the first two decades of the present century is revealed by the contemporary Bengali literature. No other political movement in Indian history, not even the non-co-operation nor the civil disobedience campaigns launched by Gandhiji could evoke such great response from our poets and writers. The spirit of the Bengali poems and songs composed during this period, explicitly demonstrated that militant nationalism was not the wild pranks of a few misguided youths, but the result of a great national awakening which profoundly swayed the people at large. We know epochs in Indian history when a large number of men belonging to different classes left their hearth and home to seek spiritual salvation. We find this same phenomenon in Bengal, only political salvation being substituted for spiritual. Like the saints of the ancient times Dr. R.C. Majumdar observes, the young revolutionaries willingly forsook their near and dear ones and dedicated their lives to the service of the country in order to carry on a life-long struggle to achieve their goal. We may call them emotional, unreasonable and unrealistic. But nobody can doubt either the depth of their feelings or the sincerity of their faith. That their compatriots never doubted it, is proved by the homage paid to them both in private and in public.<sup>6</sup>

In no age or country are real martyrs of this type counted in large numbers. Nor does everyone of those who join the movement reaches a high or ideal standard. But if we judge by the conduct of the leaders and the general level maintained by their followers, we have no ground to sneer at the praise, admiration and homage which they received from their contemporaries. We are also bound to admit that militant nationalism in Bengal was not merely a passing phase in politics but a great movement that swept over the country from one end to another. It made material contributions to our political thought and progress. But it would be a mistake to estimate its effects and importance by that test alone. The Revolutionaries galvanized the political consciousness of the nation in a way that nothing else could, and made a deep impression upon all the subsequent stages of our political advance.<sup>7</sup>

From the historical perspective, the revolutionary movement may be regarded as the first of its kind to preach the doctrine of '*Purna*

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6. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-173.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

*Swaraj*' or complete independence from the British rule and of total severance of all ties with the British Empire as the main political objective of India's struggle for liberation. The great mass upsurge in Bengal, directed not merely against the partition of the province but also against the continuance of the British rule itself, electrified the whole of India and an anti-British resentment swept the nation.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it was Aurobindo Ghosh, who for the first time, propagated the ideal of 'Purna Swaraj' in the *Bande Mataram* paper. The militant nationalists carried a step further the spirituo-intellectual regeneration which began in Bengal in the middle of the 19th Century by invigorating their countrymen with the message of hope and freedom. Through his writings and public speeches, Aurobindo contributed much to the cause of national awakening, despite the fact that since he wrote in English, his writings made the greatest impact on the minds of the English-educated intelligentsia. His inspiring writings and speeches broke the myth of the British cultural superiority which was enthusiastically fostered by the foreign rulers. His contribution towards creating a climate of revolutionary nationalism in India was very substantial.<sup>9</sup>

Though the revolutionaries failed to achieve any striking success, they should be given the credit of setting revolutionary politics in Bengal on a firm footing, and giving it a definite character and direction which it retained till the end. Aurobindo and his associates not only made the cult of bombs popular, but also gave it an honoured place in the struggle for freedom.<sup>10</sup>

The revolutionary movement in Bengal gave birth to a new spirit or sentiment which made itself felt in all departments of life. It ushered in a period of regeneration and renaissance. The cry of 'Bande Mataram' became the symbol of this movement all over India, and Bankim Chandra's immortal song beginning with these two words was given the status of the national anthem. The greatest contribution of this movement was the spirit of creativeness with which it invigorated the nation."<sup>11</sup>

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8. Karan Singh, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay, 1970), pp. 91, 143-144.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 101-102, 173.

10. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 276-277.

11. M.A. Buch *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism* (Baroda, 1940), p. 50.



Aurobindo in his famous 'Open letter to my countrymen' published in the *Karmayogin* in 31st July, 1909, wrote "no control no cooperation should be the watchword of our lawful agitation". The use of the words 'no cooperation' is significant in the light of the non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhiji ten years later.<sup>12</sup> The militant nationalists realized that the essence of the struggle lay in the peaceful evolution of the nation's own strength by her own efforts. This was a capital idea. Gandhian ideas were to a great extent anticipated, and it was also suggested that the movement, in order to be effective, must be kept on the broad lines of justice and humanity. Aurobindo said, "All through our campaign of passive resistance in Bengal, it has been our earliest endeavour to keep ourselves within the limit of law... and by this very regard for the laws of that government we have to a very large extent, made them powerless...remember this that patriotism is good, excellent and divine, only when it furthers the end of universal humanity..."<sup>13</sup> In the extremist ideas of boycott of every form of association and cooperation with the government are to be found the germs of the non-co-operation movement of Gandhi in 1921.<sup>14</sup> When Aurobindo propagated the ideas of passive or defensive resistance and withholding of cooperation, he anticipated what Gandhi later on put into action. But Gandhiji laid the greatest emphasis on non-violence which, to him, was a matter of faith and not merely a policy to be followed in politics.<sup>15</sup> Aurobindo, on the other hand, advocated passive resistance as a means to an end, as the best policy suited for the purpose of driving out the British and liberating the country from the foreign yoke. Hence, in the matter of applicability of this ideal of passive resistance, we find a great difference between Aurobindo's and Gandhi's views. While Gandhiji preached non-violence or ahimsa as an eternal moral principle, Aurobindo upheld the doctrine of passive resistance as a dynamic creed. Aurobindo's idea of passive resistance never supported meek submission to illegal outrage. In this respect he rather went a step forward, and stressed the need for active resistance to supplement passive resistance, whenever necessary. Aurobindo

12. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 178-179.

13. M.A. Buch, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 196-197.

14. R.G. Pradhan, *India's Struggle For Swaraj*, (Madras, 1930), p. 84.

15. "Sri Aurobindo's Contribution to the Freedom Movement," Proceedings of a seminar organised by the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1976, written by Arun Chandra Guha, p. 61.



must be given the credit of making valuable contributions towards laying the foundations of the edifice of national freedom which Gandhiji and others later constructed.<sup>16</sup>

In the opinion of Aurobindo, Bepin Chandra Pal may be regarded as the prophet and first preacher of passive resistance on the basis of which Mahatma Gandhi formulated his own concept of *satyagraha* and non-cooperation. In between the period of Amritsar Congress (December, 1919) and the special session of Calcutta Congress in September, 1920, Pal, on being invited by Motilal Nehru took over the editorial chair of the *Independent*, an Allahabad daily. He wrote in that paper, "non-co-operation must be our cry and policy." (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, June 5, 1920). He envisaged non-co-operation as a constitutional movement which must work within certain limits. In fact, Pal introduced the idea of non-co-operation in Indian politics. When Gandhi announced his plan of non-co-operation in the later part of 1920, Pal saw little or nothing new in this idea.<sup>17</sup> Later Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose also held the view that Gandhiji's plan of non-co-operation was not altogether new for it represented the features of the Swadeshi Movement under the leadership of Pal, and refused to recognise the British jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup> Pal, however, did not support Gandhiji's idea of paralysing the Government and urged on a scheme of qualified non-cooperation. He had fundamental differences with Gandhi over the question of non-cooperation, passive resistance and civil disobedience, for he did not believe in absolute non-co-operation. His conviction was that a general call to paralyse the government would make civil life impossible, driving the movement out of constitutional channels. It is interesting and important to note that Pal was the first among the Indian Leaders of eminence to have the courage to point out some of the negative features of Gandhiji's political ideology at a time when the slightest criticism of Gandhiji was condemned as an act of disrespect and defamation. Nevertheless, Pal had no personal grudge against Gandhiji but only ideological differences. This is proved beyond doubt by the fact that he paid the highest compliment to Gandhiji on some memorable occasions.<sup>19</sup> One of the ideas of Pal's nationalism,

16. Karan Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 108.

17. A.P. Mookerjee, *Social and Political Ideas of Bepin Chandra Pal*, pp. 66, 107-109, f. n. *Report of the 35th Session of the Indian National Congress*, 1920, p. 73.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 109, f.n. Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, p. 70.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 114, 116.

namely the promotion of international peace and goodwill, has been included in Article 51 of the Constitution of India.<sup>20</sup>

The revolutionary movement extended its influence not only in different parts of India but also spread its tentacles outside India, in the distant parts of Asia, Europe and America. The Bengal revolutionaries who went abroad made valuable contributions to the cause of Indian freedom by raising India from relative obscurity through the press, platform and other political contacts, and placing her on the map of world opinion. The young revolutionaries for the first time made India's freedom a lively issue in international politics, and made the world conscious of India's misery and oppression at the hands of the British Government. They also made valuable contacts with revolutionary leaders and political figures of other countries, which enabled them to win the sympathy and support of many foreign powers, and this proved to be of considerable help in their freedom struggle. Thus the revolutionaries of Bengal, by their work abroad, opened a new chapter in the history of India's fight for freedom.<sup>21</sup>

The revolutionaries contributed much to the growth of a national will to freedom. This is proved beyond doubt by the efforts made by the youngmen of Bengal, both in the cities and villages, to obtain seditious literature comprising books, pamphlets and newspapers written by the revolutionaries themselves at a time when the government prescribed such possession. Also the fact that the martyrs were down-to-earth men like them, and one of them, boosted up their ego and gave them courage, confidence and pride though the latter did not always dare to imitate them. The revolutionary movement gave a sharp edge and a powerful emotional thrust to Indian nationalism which precipitated the rise of a powerful mass movement in the post World War I period.<sup>22</sup>

The Bengal Revolutionaries, almost as a rule, were subjected to brutal torture in police custody. An account of the barbarities practised by the British officials as well as the Indians who worked under them should be given a place in the history of India's fight for freedom, so that our future generation may be made aware of the inhuman treatment meted out by the British Government to the freedom-lovers and

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

21. A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, (Allahabad, 1971), p. 225.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.



political prisoners, and the price which the revolutionaries had to pay for no sin on their part except a deep and passionate love for their motherland. It is worth noting that most of the revolutionaries heroically stood the test of wanton barbarities which human pen cannot aptly describe and which the civilized world could not dream of. The police failed to extract even the slightest information from many of their victims.<sup>23</sup> This clearly shows that their moral and spiritual strength enabled them to undergo such physical torture without meek submission or confession to the British. It is worth remembering that many of the heroes of the revolutionary movement sincerely considered themselves as mere instruments in the hands of God. Many of them later joined monastic orders, and some like Aurobindo later attained a high spiritual life, and are revered today as saints.<sup>24</sup>

Reviewing the history of the freedom movement in other countries of the world, it appears that the adverse circumstances in which the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal was conducted against the British had hardly any parallel anywhere in the world. Gokhale once remarked, "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow." In fact, the revolutionary genius is the most important characteristic of Bengal.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of the role of the Bengal Revolutionaries in the struggle for India's liberation has been unfairly minimised by the official historians of the Indian National Congress who claim that the entire credit for achieving India's freedom must be given to the non-violent movement launched by the Congress under Gandhiji's leadership. This biased view of the Indian freedom struggle is rather a distortion of history which, instead of being dissipated with time, is gaining ground in the post-independence period and thereby bewildering our political thinking and knowledge of history. A close examination of the Intelligence Branch Records of the Government of Bengal and the Home Political Proceedings of the Government of India, particularly those relating to the most crucial period of the Indian struggle, proves beyond doubt that the official view of the history of the Indian

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23. Buddhadeva Bhattacharya (ed.), *Freedom Struggle and Anusilan Samiti*, Vol. I, essay entitled, "The Revolutionary Movement during World War I" by Pradyot Kumar Ghosh, (Calcutta, 1979), pp. 135, 142.

24. B.B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*, p. 179.

25. Jibantara Haldar, *Anusilan Samiti Itihas*, p. 20.



freedom movement is incorrect, biased and prejudicial, and as such cannot be accepted.<sup>26</sup>

According to the Marxist historians like E.N. Kamarov and A.I. Levkovsky, the intensification of capitalism and colonial exploitation at the end of the last century were the objective conditions for the rise of the extremist thought. In their views, the extremist intellectuals caught the spirit of rebellion from the peasants and handicraftsmen who had revolted in the Deccan and Pabna in the 1870s and from the factory-workers who had gone on strike in 1892-93 and 1901. They developed it on the basis of their own class grievances backed by famine, plague, soaring prices and Curzonian imperialism. In their opinion, the individual terrorist attacks in Bengal were "an incorrect petty bourgeois method of struggle which in the final analysis hampered the growth of mass movement."<sup>27</sup> The Russian historians have also dismissed the religious and ideological factors underlying the extremist movement in Bengal. Christopher Hill, on the other hand, does not support this Marxist view of the extremist movement. According to him, Tilak, Bepin Pal and Aurobindo were not the spokesmen of the entire class of nascent national bourgeoisie, a class whose main interest lay in the rapid development of capitalism, the growth of which was hindered by political and economic oppression of the British Government. Therefore in Tripathi's opinion, capitalism alone does not account for the rise and growth of the extremist psychology and ideology; the cult of the natural, the spontaneous and the individual, the eagerness to court suffering that sets man free of the senses, Kropotkin's talk of "the higher delights" and the philosophic equilibrium conquering death, Proudhon's praise of poverty and an incessant metamorphosis of spirit, all these elements could be traced in extremism. Professor Tripathi remarks that it was a sort of spiritual Narodnism suspended between an idealized past and an idealized future.<sup>28</sup> Tripathi further opines that the revolutionary movement of Bengal prepared the ground and set the field ready for the launching of the non-violent non-co-operation movement by Gandhi for her (India's) men and women had already learnt the mystery of life and death from the men of 1905-10.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Uma Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, (Calcutta, 1966), pp. 2-3.

27. Amallesh Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, pp. 141-142.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

The followers of the cult of violence have suffered in the estimation of the people as a result of the preaching of the cult of 'Ahimsa' or non-violence by Mahatma Gandhi. Without belittling in any way the high ethical ideal underlying the cult of non-violence, it may be pointed out that non-violence was never known to have played any important role in practical politics, particularly in case of a struggle against a highly organized and more powerful military power. But, even taking the most optimistic and charitable view of the extent of success achieved by Gandhi through non-violence, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is still an unknown factor of doubtful value, whereas armed struggle has always and everywhere been almost universally recognized as an important factor and method in a struggle for freedom from the alien rule. The British Government against whom the revolutionary movement was directed in India, has approved of terrorism in other countries in circumstances similar to those prevailing in India. Even Surendranath Banerji, a political leader of moderate views and opposed to terrorism, admitted that "the revolutionary movement in Bengal was backed by men whose selfless devotion to the country could not be called into question." Therefore it is absolutely unfair and unjust to condemn the cult of violence or minimise its importance in the struggle for freedom.<sup>30</sup>

If after a generation's struggle the methods of the revolutionaries were given up, it was not because those had been found useless, but because the Indian people by then, had outgrown their use, and were prepared for a different form of political agitation. It is true that most of the Revolutionary groups were later dissolved. The Yugantar group was formally liquidated in July, 1937, and many revolutionaries joined the Congress fold. But they joined the Congress because by then the Congress had become quite revolutionary in its demands and outlook, and the presence of these revolutionaries and their emotional impact on the people strengthened the Indian freedom movement, and helped it towards attainment of its goal.<sup>31</sup> Many Revolutionaries joined the non-co-operation Movement led by Gandhiji, because of the ample scope to go to the villages and thereby to come in direct contact with the masses and awaken their consciousness in regard to the prevailing

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30. R.C. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, preface.

31. A.C. Bose, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 235-236.



circumstances in the country.<sup>32</sup> Though many members of the Yugantar party joined the non-co-operation movement with mental reservations about non-violence, they fully realised the potentialities of the new movement, and its possibilities of developing into a revolutionary mass struggle.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting and relevant to note in this connection that M.N. Roy in his *Memoirs* wrote that during the years 1918-'19 there was not only a revival but also a mass movement developing under the banner of the Congress. Though this remarkable phenomenon was attributed to the advent of Gandhiji with his doctrines of Satyagraha and non-violent non-co-operation, he held the view that no individual could create a countrywide mass movement out of nothing. An objective examination of all the facts reported in the press led M.N. Roy to the conclusion that there was a great volume of mass discontent which was the historical background of the non-co-operation movement.<sup>34</sup> To the creation of this discontent the revolutionary agitation of the two preceeding decades contributed not a little, though other factors connected with the impact of the First World War were also there, and Gandhiji's unique personality soon gave this mass discontent a new channel of expression.

M.N. Roy represented some of the fundamental principles of Bepin Chandra Pal's ideology. In 1911, Pal, the spiritual humanist said, "the ideal end of civilization is perfection of man, not merely in his physical and material but equally also, in his moral and spiritual aspects... It is the perfection of man as a social unit..."<sup>35</sup> Roy, the Marxist turned humanist, in his later days also expressed similar views. "The crying need of the time is to harmonise ethics with social philosophy and political practice..." Like Pal, Roy believed that it was not possible to bring about a political and economic reconstruction of the country unless the intellectual, cultural and spiritual atmosphere of the country

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32. Oral Interview taken of Sri Aswini Kumar Ganguly and Sri Ganesh Ghosh at their residences in Calcutta respectively on 17.4.83 and 4.11.82 and Oral History Interview taken of Sri Surendra Mohan Ghose by K.P. Rungachary and Dr. Hari Dev Sharma on 27th February, 1968 for the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

33. A.C. Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 497.

34. *Memoris of M.N. Roy*, (Bombay, 1964), p. 543.

35. A.P. Mookerjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 156, f.n. B.C. Pal, *The Soul of India*, p. 54.



was changed. Thus Roy inherited the basic thoughts of Pal - in his advocacy of a rationalist humanist politics, in his internationalism and in his independent way of thinking.<sup>36</sup>

It is not yet sufficiently recognised that much of what C.R. Das became in his political life was owing to Bepin Chandra Pal. Sundarimohan Das writes, "Young Chittaranjan took his early lesson in politics from Bepin Chandra..." Sir P.C. Mitter, a member of the then Governor's Executive Council also said. "...He (Pal) was the political guru of Mr. Das."<sup>37</sup> Subhas Chandra Bose was also much influenced by Pal in building up his philosophy of nationalism. This is quite evident from his presidential speech delivered at the Maharashtra Provincial Conference held at Poona in 1928. Pal also observed, "... As an old Nationalist, I am personally happy to find Mr. Bose frankly feeling his way to the old lines of nationalist thought..."<sup>38</sup> Thus the legacy of Pal's thought can be traced among the later political leaders who played a significant role in Indian politics in the subsequent generation.

Subhas Chandra Bose further admitted that while residing at the Eden Hindu Hostel of the Presidency College, Calcutta, he was greatly under the influence of the Bengal revolutionaries who generally followed the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. He also studied the *Arya* edited by Sri Aurobindo, and was convinced that spiritual enlightenment was necessary for effective national service.<sup>39</sup> Later, during the Second World War, Subhas tried to emulate the example of the revolutionaries who had sought to liberate India politically with the support of foreign powers inimical to the British.

The revolutionary movement in Bengal gave new dimensions to the lives of later political leaders who played a prominent role in the struggle for India's freedom. Even Jawaharlal Nehru Wrote, "...When Sri Aurobindo was writing his famous articles in the *Bande Mataram*, I

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36. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157, f.n. Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties*, p. 45.

37. A.P. Mookerjee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 153, f.n. *The Statesman*, May 24, 1932, under the caption, 'A clear Thinker-'

38. *Ibid.*, p. 155, f.n. *The Englishman*, May 10, 1928, under the caption 'Subhas Bose's Nationalist Ideals'.

39. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 59, f.n. Subhas Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim, an unfinished autobiography and collected letters, 1897-1921*, (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 50-51.

was then at school in England and later at College in Cambridge and was thus rather cut off from events in India. Nevertheless some news trickled through and the great anti-partition movement in Bengal filled us with enthusiasm. Among the famous figures of those days, Sri Aurobindo stood out and drew the admiration of the young... The great anti-partition movement in Bengal gained much of its philosophy from him and undoubtedly prepared the day for the great movement led by Mahatma Gandhi..."<sup>40</sup>

It is true that the dream of the revolutionaries did not materialise at the very moment. There is no doubt that the revolutionary activities of the period under discussion failed to liberate the country from foreign domination. They did not even succeed in keeping away promising young men of Great Britain from joining the ranks of the Indian Civil Service or the Indian Police Service. The Indian soldier's loyalty to the British Government could not also be shaken. Though many terrorist outrages took place in Bengal between 1908 and 1918 but upto the end of this period almost all the victims of these outrages were Indians loyal to the British Crown. Attempts to end the lives of high-placed British officials like Minto, Hardinge, Fraser, Kingsford and Gordon ended in failure.<sup>41</sup> The revolutionaries were not certainly lacking in courage or the spirit of self-sacrifice, but they suffered from organizational weakness and were repeatedly led down by traitors. It is relevant to note in this connection that another main weakness of the Bengal revolutionary movement stemmed from the efficient espionage system of the British Government which successfully detected almost every important plan and conspiracy of the Bengal revolutionaries before they were carried out into action. Though the Anushilan Samiti succeeded in building up a close-knit organisation in East Bengal, its leaders were not above human failings, jealousy and scramble for leadership which sometimes spoiled their chances of success. A study of the memoirs and reminiscences of eminent revolutionaries reveals the fact that almost everyone of the writers claimed to be the most important and far-reaching personage. There was a good deal of jealousy and scramble for leadership among those who planned revolution from abroad. In India also these were evident. For example,

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40. Karan Singh *Op. Cit.*, forward written by Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, (Srinagar, 1962).

41. B.B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 177-178.



Barindra could not tolerate the leadership of Jatindranath Banerjee, though both of them were followers of Aurobindo.<sup>42</sup>

Still, as B.B. Majumdar points out, the revolutionary movement should not be judged by the immediate results only. The splendid examples of martyrdom and heroic self-dedication to the national cause set by the young revolutionaries opened a new vista of hope and gave much courage and inspiration to their countrymen at a time when the country was undergoing the greatest stress and strain under foreign domination and economic exploitation. As a result, prison and even gallows lost their terror to many Indians. It intensified their patriotic spirit and enhanced their urge for freedom. This development made it easier for Mahatma Gandhi to get thousands of persons ready to court arrest for their motherland in the following decade. Even the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 came partly as a result of these militant nationalist activities. The British Government now felt that some sort of responsible government must be introduced in India in order to avert an immediate popular upsurge in this country.<sup>43</sup>

We may conclude by saying that by their daring acts of violence and heroic self-sacrifice, the revolutionaries of Bengal for the first time broke the myth of the invincibility of the British Government and fostered a deep hatred in the minds of their countrymen against the British. Furthermore the new and dynamic ideology of the Bengal revolutionaries, though quite advanced in age for the ordinary people to grasp its full meaning and implications, provided valuable guidelines relying on which the later political leaders of the subsequent period developed their own ideology and successfully led the nationalist movement towards the path of final victory. In the post-independence period there has developed a strong urge among many modern scholars and among ordinary laymen to eulogise Gandhiji as the most important national leader and to shower on him all the praise and credit for achieving India's liberation. But this is not quite true, for the Bengal revolutionaries certainly played a very significant role at the initial stage of the nationalist struggle. So, it will not be far from truth if one observes that revolutionary nationalism, constitutional agitation for reforms as well as the *satyagraha* movements of Gandhiji contributed almost equally towards the achievement of India's political independence.

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42. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.



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